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ABSTRACT

When the Experimental Schools (ES) program began in 1972, schools in conservative and traditional River District, Wyoming, had just undergone a controversial consolidation. The ES program was perceived by new administrators as a source of necessary unity, useful outside help, and financial incentives. School trustees were "favorable but guarded" about involvement in federal programs. Having received a one-year planning grant, the administration eagerly worked with the community, but not with teachers or students, to develop a five part plan of educational change, involving career education, community participation, curriculum evaluation and coordination, cultural education, and special services. Budgetary misunderstandings and Washington's call for extensive revision of the plan caused animosity, and other district business took priority over ES. Concurrently, the third in a series of four federal project officers arrived, offering a different approach to help the district get what it, not Washington, wanted. However, by 1975 there existed little commitment to ES, no district cooperation or unity, and no real ES program. In April 1975, to salvage something of the project, ES was decentralized so that each area administrative principal had full budgetary and programing control. The project ended in 1978 after a final two years of greatly reduced federal funding. (SB)

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The Local-Federal Interface in Rural School Improvement: River District, Wyoming

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Donald A. Messerschmidt

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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THE LOCAL-FEDERAL INTERFACE IN RURAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:

RIVER DISTRICT, WYOMING

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May 1979

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PREFACE

This case study examines the local context of change imposed and encouraged by the Experimental Schools project in River District, Wyoming. At the same time, the goal is to put into perspective the federal presence in River District--a presence invited by application from the locals. Naturally, my own perspectives on the events there are limited by a number of factors.

In the first place, the bulk of my observations were made within the bounds of the school district; hence my perspective is heavily weighted to the local scene and local conditions and concerns. I acknowledge but do not apologize for this because an understanding of the local perspective on planned change of this nature is critically important if any successes in educational and social development are to be anticipated.

Secondly, the very magnitude of the data was too immense to include in so short a volume. Therefore, in the reconstruction of events, relevant facts have been winnowed from my lengthy observations, from the many documents examined, and from the large corpus of public and private conversations and statements heard and recorded. Furthermore, much of what I have used here was intended for other purposes and other audiences--school and community events are not normally conducted for the benefit of visiting social scientists! It has been my responsibility, therefore, to arrange the array of data into a document which speaks to the purposes which I consider to be most important here. These are, primarily, to describe and analyze the local, rural context of change, the nature of federal-local relations which set the tone for ES in River District, and the aspirations and discouragements, the trials and errors, and the inevitable

conflicts and accommodations which attend projects of this nature.

Thirdly, the data are qualitative, not quantitative, and the conclusions drawn are often based on studied opinion and subjective analysis--an approach well within the tradition of the social sciences, especially cultural anthropology. For some of the data--the "facts" of the case--I was my own best authority. Indeed, for some of the data-gathering needs of Abt Associates, both within and beyond this ethnography (i.e., their more formal surveys and questionnaires and various computerized social and economic assessments), the on-site researchers were expected to act as "expert informants" in their own right, with an intimate and in-depth knowledge of the various sites and projects, school districts and communities in which they lived and pursued the research (see Rosenblum and Louis, 1979; Fitzsimmons and Freedman, 1979).[1]

Despite these caveats, the description and analysis of events in River District and the conclusions drawn about federal-local relations--about the introduction and implementation of educational change at a cultural distance--provide important insight and knowledge for federal and local agencies and their agents of change. The task has been difficult, but not impossible. When the River Districts of our nation fail in their attempts to induce comprehensive change, and when those failures are the result of the incompatibility and insensitivity to one another of both parties involved, as was the case here between River District and the National Institute of Education (NIE), we inevitably learn something about the difficulties of bridging the cultural and conceptual gaps between them. There is, of course, much more to be learned from these sorts of experiences, but that is beyond the limits of this study.

My duty, as an applied anthropologist, is to provide data on all the contexts of change, the local context as well as the agency's. To this end, I've tried to examine both the culture of the target group in River District and of the innovating agency (NIE in this case), but I recognize the limitations on my knowledge of, and appreciation for, the context of belief, values, and other premises on which decisions and actions were based within the federal agency. For the most part--with the exception of part of Chapter Four--this book is about River District's role in Experimental Schools, and I leave the in-depth study of NIE and the ES program at the national level to other researchers (see Sproull, Weiner and Wolf, 1978; Corwin, 1977).

This case study, like any case study, is selective and partial, an abstraction or caricaturization of sorts, but an ethnographic caricaturization--a representative and composite abridgment of the whole, prepared from the perspective of socio-cultural anthropology (Erickson, 1973). The study is selective by necessity: much information has been included, much has been left out. In order to draw attention to local values and to highlight certain social structural aspects of the school district and its culture, and to compare differences in values held by persons inside the district and those outside of it, I have minimized some of the diversity, the very real variety of attitudes, actions, and values of River District. No single participant who reads this study may feel that it is representative of his or her point of view, either in the present or as it may be remembered to have been in the past.

At the same time, I recognize that it is my responsibility to recreate the events of the ES project and to order the data on River District

in ways that make them both as truthful, understandable, believable, and as free of distortion and bias as possible. I have tried to do this to the best of my ability.

I am indebted to a very wide range of people, all of whom participated either in the events documented here, or in preparing or critiquing this case study at various stages of development. I am especially appreciative of the hospitality of school district officials, staff, students, and community people throughout River District as neighbors, friends, and willing respondents to many questions and observations. They were the source of many data. They gave me advice and offered their opinions and recollections openly. There were times of stress during the course of the research--a not unexpected condition in doing research in one's own society (see Chapter Eight)--but all of those involved were honest in their appraisal of the ES project and the outside evaluation of it. There are too many local people to name individually, but they know who they are. To each of them, my sincere thanks!

I have a special feeling of gratitude for two anthropology colleagues. The first is Marylyn C. Richen, who assisted in some of the data gathering and early analysis and writing while she was employed in River District as my associate on-site researcher. Parts of this study are drawn from our joint reports and papers and the many lengthy discussions together about the project. Hence some parts reflect her invaluable role in the process of case study development, and she will recognize certain passages which she phrased in conversation and in writing. The second is Jacquetta Hill, whose impact on the case study came much later, just prior to completion of the final draft. She assisted me in the form of lengthy consultations and critiques of the design, purpose, and overall

themes of the study, and many of her suggestions for improvement have been incorporated into this volume. To both Marilyn and Jacquetta I express my deepest appreciation for their time, energies, sensitive observations, insight, and helpful suggestions.

At various other times during the development and writing of the case study a number of outside consultants read and critiqued it. These include such applied anthropologists, educational sociologists, educational researchers, and educators, as Homer G. Barnett, Ray Barnhart, Phillip Cusick, Gordon Donaldson, Elizabeth Eddy, Neal Gross, and Harry F. Wolcott. Similarly, I have a special appreciation for the support and assistance of the research project staff at Abt Associates Inc., in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Robert E. Herriott, Director of Project Rural, his two deputy directors, Stephen J. Fitzsimmons and Michael B. Kane, and a host of others at Abt headquarters have always been encouraging and helpful. Peter Desmond, Abby Freedman, and M.G. Trend in particular have helped at various stages of the case study development, and many of their valuable suggestions have been incorporated into the final document. Likewise, I must thank Andrea Kovacs and Mary Schumacher for their important roles in overseeing much of the day-to-day logistical support of the project and in editing the final draft, respectively. Ultimate responsibility for this volume, however, is entirely my own.

Others who played important roles in the research include several project officers and staff members of NIE's Experimental Schools program. I am also grateful for the supportive environments at Case Western Reserve University, Oregon State University, and Washington State University, where I was able to complete major portions of the analysis and writing, interspersed with teaching and other research obligations.

Finally, to my wife Kareen I own the deepest debt of gratitude for her personal presence, love and support throughout my professional career, and particularly during our three-year stay in River District and the three years of final preparation following that. Kareen has helped the most in putting it all together.

Pullman, Washington
April 1979

Donald A. Messerschmidt

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When, in the late 1860's and early 1870's, the first schools came to Wyoming on the crest of the western ranching boom:

> It symbolized the dawn of a neighborhood, and it brought a change into the wilderness air. The feel of it struck cold upon the free spirits of the cowpunchers, and they told each other that, what with the women and children and wire fences, this country would not long be a country for men. (Wister 1902:96-97)

One of the first manifestations of civilization which the pioneer forefathers established wherever they settled on the American Frontier was a school. After the initial shock of its establishment, the issue was no longer its coming, but its control, for with the dawn of a neighborhood came the dawn of community self-identity. In River District, Wyoming, and throughout the state of Wyoming, local control has remained an issue ever since.

Schooling--a better education--has long been a primary value in American life, and its free access and local control have been important parts of the American dream. In River District, where this case study of educational innovation takes place, the national theme of a better education for all has been heard since the first ranchers, railroaders, and miners arrived and settled and began building their part of the social system that is rural Wyoming. Controversy over what a better education means and who controls its access, its content, and its cost and governance has pervaded the history of that state's society (Larson, 1965). In the 1930's, one observer of Wyoming public education was moved to describe the quest for local control as a "cherished illusion" (Knudson 1937:195).

Illusion or not, local control is still an issue which plagues schooling, as well as much of the rest of Wyoming's social, cultural, economic, and political life. A more recent observer has put it this way: "This was once a rural nation which continues to jealously guard the autonomy of its local institutions in the face of prevailing nationalizing influences..." (Corwin 1977:2).

And, just as nobody is against a better education in River District, Wyoming, so nobody is really against better social and governmental services, better economic opportunities, or better standards of living--provided, of course, that the locals have a say in what "better" is. Now, almost a century after Owen Wister's observations about change, the attentive concern of Wyomingites is not so much directed toward the coming of women, children, and wire fences as it is toward other newcomers--outsiders generally--and certain powerful non-local interests in particular, such as the energy industry and big government--the neo-colonial "eastern establishment."

Today's sentiments in Wyoming sound much more like those recorded by Molly Ivins of the New York Times news service (1978):

> "Wyoming is an energy colony for the East," said Doug Elliott, a Worland electrician. "It's being exploited for coal and for power...so the East can keep up a ridiculous standard of energy consumption."
>
> . . .
>
> In Wyoming, what goes on elsewhere, in New York, Washington or California seems very, very far away. "It's not alienation, it's isolation," said Gov. Ed Herschler. "And we like the isolation."

And a grocer in one River District boom town summed up local feelings like this: "It ain't the money that's going to ruin this state... It ain't the coal companies. It ain't the uranium. It's the outsiders."

Ivins concludes that "the unease and resentment in Wyoming is not so much over the depredations of industry--Wyomingites don't hold much truck with environmentalists--as it is over 'the outsiders'."

It was in this context of a long-felt concern for local control and a resentment toward outsiders, of recent school consolidation and administrative change (mandated by state law), and of rapid growth (by transient outsiders--miners, or "boomers" as they are called), that the five-year, half-million dollar educational development and research program called Experimental Schools (ES) was first introduced to River District Wyoming, in 1972.[1] This is a case study of one local manifestation of that federal program.

The perspective of this study is at once local and anthropological. The data are primarily from River District, where the bulk of the research took place. The researcher-author is a socio-cultural anthropologist. The underlying social structures and cultural traditions of rural Wyoming are important parts of the data of this study. The period is the mid-1970's, a time of mining boom and economic growth in Wyoming (in contrast to economic, energy, and constitutional crises elsewhere across the nation). The problem addressed in this volume is the school district's voluntary involvement with the nation-wide Experimental Schools program which encouraged locals to try out new ideas for change and improvement of rural education. The case study deals particularly with the administration and the power behind ES in River District, and with the handling of Experimental Schools by officers of the National Institute of Education, the parent agency in Washington, D.C. It is a study of two "cultural" entities--locals and feds--the rural educators, ranchers, miners, and townspeople of River District as contrasted with the federal bureaucrats. It is a study of two

distinctly unique educational agencies--each with power and authority in its own right, in its own place--trying to work together to effect planned educational change at a cultural distance. Ultimately, it is a study of the people from each of these places, far distant from one another, and of the troubles they encountered in pursuing the goal of providing a better education.

THE EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The developments which caused the flow of events herein documented and analyzed began in March 1972, when the U.S. Office of Education announced a nationwide competition for small rural school districts interested in participating in a program of planned educational change. This program, called Experimental Schools, was soon transferred to the newly created National Institute of Education (NIE), which was to be responsible for its implementation. The ES program had been established by Congress in 1971 to improve the quality of federal efforts to fund and study educational change in American schools. Program planners chose to emphasize a holistic approach to problems of educational change which would incorporate a considerable amount of applied social science research.

The ES program was designed to test the hypothesis that comprehensive educational change was more likely to lead to significant improvement in the quality of schooling than were piecemeal, categorical, or incremental approaches to change. The program announcement instructed competing school districts to consider projects that addressed local needs and that would ensure simultaneous improvements in curriculum; staff development; community participation; the use of time, space, and facilities; administration, organization, and governance; and ongoing evaluation. Rural school administrators who were willing to commit their districts to

such a program of comprehensive change over a five-year period were invited to apply by submitting brief letters of interest. Among the attractions were local planning to attend to locally recognized needs, promises of high levels of funding, few strings--a minimum of red tape, and a chance for rural systems to catch up, as it were, to their urban counterparts in terms of innovative educational programming.

From the approximately 320 responding districts, ten were eventually selected for funding; among them was River District in rural Wyoming. In announcing the awards in 1972, federal officials emphasized that the ES program was designed to learn about the process of planned comprehensive change from a limited number of project sites so that other school districts might benefit from their experiences.

Shortly thereafter, Abt Associates Inc. (an applied social science research firm in Cambridge, Mass.) was chosen by the federal government to conduct an outside evaluation of the efforts, the successes, and the failures of the ten rural ES sites. In order to test the overriding hypothesis of the program, Abt Associates was responsible for documenting local attempts to plan, implement, and evaluate comprehensive educational change. As a trained educator and applied anthropologist with experience in community studies and a theoretical interest in socio-cultural change, I was hired in July 1973 to study the River District ES project. I immediately moved to Spring Creek, the school district administrative center, to take up residence as an on-site researcher/ethnographer. This case study represents the culmination of my efforts to document, describe, and analyze events related to the Experimental Schools project efforts in River District.[2]

APPROACHING THE CASE STUDY

In preparing to conduct the research for this study of the ES project in River District, I considered two approaches: I could select certain schools and classrooms to describe and analyze as more or less representative units in which various changes were to be introduced; or I could examine school administration and governance as the locus of decision-making power and potential for influencing the process of planning, implementing and evaluating change. There are excellent examples of each approach in the ethnographic literature on schooling. The works of Khleif (1974), Hill-Burnett (1973), Henry (1965), Rosenfeld (1971), Singleton (1976), and Warren (1967), are representative of studies of schools and classrooms within the context of a complex contemporary society. Studies of administration and bureaucracy in education are fewer; they include the works of Gallaher (1973), Spindler (1963), Vidich and McReynolds (1971), Warren (1976), and Wolcott (1977).

For a variety of reasons, the study of schools and classrooms was determined to be infeasible in River District. For one, the magnitude of the site was overwhelming--the large geographic size (see Chapter Two) and concomitant logistics of working there would have created problems of sampling and timing, for example, which only a team of several on-site researchers could have adequately handled. The complex nature of the local ES project effort prompted me, working alone for the most part,[3] to concentrate the research effort on project administration and governance, and ultimately on the culture of power and bureaucracy (see Chapter Eight).

Rather early on in the research it become clear that considerable time and energy were being expended on educational administration in general and on project administration in particular, well away from the

classrooms and the pupils for whom the ES program was ostensibly intended. Two reasons for this emerge from the data, namely the existence of difficulties in dealing with the federal agency, and in conceptualizing and implementing the ES project components locally (see Chapters Three and Six), which limited the effective introduction of ES to teachers and pupils alike. Both difficulties were described to me on many occasions by local teachers and project staff, and are reflected in the many problems and local reactions to those problems encountered throughout the life of the project.

The lack of substantive data on classrooms and pupils in this case study reflects this situation. Relatively little understanding or excitement about the potential utility of ES was ever successfully transmitted downward from the level of the trustees, superintendents, administrative principals, and project staff to the teaching staff, whose role it was to implement ES in the classrooms. Some informants, recognizing their inability to "get the ball rolling" in the schools, blamed poor federal-local relations the most for this impasse. Others blamed their own local project staff and school system administrators. Some preferred to point to what a few outstanding teachers had done despite the project as examples of the fulfillment of the ES project design and goals.

There is no attempt in this study to fix the blame for the limitations of River District's Experimental Schools project effort. Rather, my major concern is to elucidate the conditions under which change was introduced to the school district and the context into which it was received. Early recognition of the difficulties described, and their continual reaffirmation as the data emerged, encouraged me to concentrate

my efforts on documenting project planning and administration efforts at the top; the entire case study is directed toward that end.

"STUDYING UP"

In choosing to focus my attentions at the top, I took my cue from Laura Nader and others who advocate studying the "cultures of power" in our nation. Ethnographic research in one's own society provides anthropology with many prospects for what Laura Nader has called "studying up" (1974). She characterizes "studying up" as a worthy endeavor of anthropologists "to contribute to our understanding of the processes whereby power and responsibility are exercised in the United States. Moreover," she writes, "there is a certain urgency...the quality of life...may depend upon the extent to which citizens understand those who shape attitudes and actually control institutional structures" (1974:284).[4]

When I began the task of examining and analyzing planned educational change in River District, I consciously chose to study the culture of power. I proposed to "study up" within the local educational bureaucracy, the school administration (or "central office"), where the locus of power and authority seemed to exist. One of my first goals was to clearly identify that locus of power and the concomitant potential for innovation and change in the system. "Where is the action?", I asked myself. "Who is in authority here? Who are the power holders, the decision makers? What factors in and out of the system, what values, what attitudes and situational constraints and contingencies guide them? Who has the real power here to effect change, or to stifle it? Who has the responsibility for success or failure in the local ES project?" And ultimately, "Who runs the show?"

The answers were never easy, never straightforward. It became obvious that no one person "ran the show" or held all of the strings of power and authority. Rather, many persons held different forms of authority and power, and several important factors--both internal and external to the local school system--impinged on the management of River District and the local ES project.

Given my early observations and certain intuitive feelings about the nature of rural school systems and communities in general, and of River District in particular, I settled on the study of school system leadership--the administration--where, with patience and time and the time-honored methods of participant-observation and interviewing, I could surely detect and document, describe and analyze, a range of expressions of power and authority.

Choosing the school district administration as the unit of study entailed observation and documentation of bureaucratic activities in which the school district managers were engaged while planning, implementing, and evaluating the ES project. Administrators in this instance included the superintendent and his assistant superintendent, four area administrative principals and their subordinates (principals, and head teachers), a small ES project staff with its director, evaluator, facilitator, and coordinator, and the designated leaders of local citizen committees.[5] My strategy was not only to observe and record interaction among and between the persons engaged in these roles, but between them as insiders and a host of outsiders among whom the federal project officer from NIE (and me as the on-site researcher) figures more or less prominently.

Because the educational administration, or any bureaucracy for that

matter, is not a community, but only part of a larger socio-cultural system, and because the context of the educational bureaucracy was important to my study, I also chose to engage in a larger, more holistic study of River District as a rural community. Given such a large and many-stranded research effort, I found myself at times in the awkward position of playing too many roles at one time, of juggling rapport as if on a tightrope and going in two directions (or more) at once, and of being buffeted by too many contingencies in and out of my immediate view to fully understand or appreciate, let alone adequately control (see Chapter Eight).

PREMISES, PURPOSES AND THEMES

There are a number of themes relevant to understanding the introduction, implementation, and evaluation of social and educational change in rural America. This account touches on several of them, gleaned from my research in River District.

The case study overall is predicated on three ideals. First, certain situational and contextual variables--such as the local cultural-historical identity and the locally perceived "reality" of an institution such as a school system, and of a community such as River District--tend to guide and mediate responses of people within the local system and community to ideas about change.

Secondly, an appreciation for the local context is a necessary first step in introducing or evaluating development efforts (see Britan 1978a, 1978b; Foster 1969). In anthropology, analyses of the "logic" of situations, of the cultural-historical context and overall environment of purposeful action, has received considerable attention (Van Velson 1964). Situational logicians, however, have traditionally analyzed social change which is

externally caused and essentially individual in nature (cf. Jarvie 1967), Messerschmidt 1976b). They have paid scant attention to the pre-existing social structures and internal cultural conditions of the target populations (see Barnett 1953).

On the other hand, some development planners and researchers have often looked only for obstacles to change within the target populations, internally caused, with little consideration for how development agencies and programs themselves might be modified and improved to best fit the local situation. Obstacles to change, from this point of view, are too often thought to exist only within the group on whom development is focused, and not within the group of developers (Foster 1969, 1973). There is too little questioning of the value of the development strategy and too much concern with how the local culture can be manipulated, adapted, or changed to meet the outside development agency goals. Rectifying this situation requires us to look beyond the context of the target situation and to examine, with equanimity, the context and operating premises of the agency and the agents of change. Barnett (1953) speaks of this as one of the principal roles of the applied anthropologist, as does George Foster:

> The study of bureaucracy must be added to the anthropologist's traditional object of analysis..., if he is to do the best applied work. When an innovating organization is looked at as a society with its own culture, marked by formal structure, division of responsibilities, values, and unquestioned premises, it quickly becomes apparent that the form taken by a particular administrative structure will have a great deal to do with success or failure in its efforts to accomplish change. When the national, bureaucratic, and professional assumptions that underlie planning and operations, all of which tend to be taken for granted, are laid bare, they can be examined to see to what extent they actually apply to contemporary conditions. (Foster 1969:113)

> Today we are beginning to realize that knowledge about the social and cultural forms of the innovating organization, about the structure and functions of bureaucratic institutions, is just as essential as knowledge about recipient peoples to successful planned change. This recognition has come late, and many people still fail to appreciate it. (Foster 1969:90)

Thirdly, besides understanding the long-held historical and cultural traditions imbedded within local situations, it is incumbent on development agency personnel to look critically at their own traditions and assumptions about change, at how their own premises for action are generated and how they eventually affect and/or react with the local conditions. By enlarging the inquiry of change and development to include the history, the culture, and the social order of the place and its people, broadly and holistically, and by combining this with an examination of the nature of the premises and the effects of planned change imposed or encouraged from outside, a more comprehensive and pragmatic grasp of the meaning and the significance of change and of adaptation to change in a particular instance can be gained (cf. Bennett 1969, 1974, 1976).

This whole process is analogous to holding up Clyde Kluckhohn's (1944) now proverbial anthropological "Mirror for Man," and looking intensely at the infinite variety of cultural expressions which it reflects. Therein, one can gain a better perspective on one's self as superimposed on a view of all the others. In this case study I look closely at the socio-cultural system of River District as one representative (and hence, not unique) example of the rural American west in an attempt to gain a better understanding of both the insiders and the outsiders (including myself and the various representatives of NIE) involved in a costly, lengthy, and not very successful experiment in planned educational change. Ultimately, holding up the mirror is the primary objective of this study.

Each chapter in this book either mirrors or sets the stage for the appreciation and understanding of the basic themes of the study. Chapter Two begins with an examination of the cultural history of River District. It is focused particularly on the development of rural social life and public education, and on the meaning, the place, the traditions, and the general context of schooling. Then, as the educational change events of the 1970s and Experimental Schools are introduced, the reader is better able to appreciate local enthusiasm, as well as local resistance and resentment, toward change.

Throughout the case study, there is a strong emphasis on the historical context and upon holism--the study of the larger context (both historical and contemporary) of events. These emphases are justified, I feel, by the general rules of social theory which counsel us that, when seeking to explain the present, we must examine the past, and when attempting to explain a part we must place it into perspective within the whole (see, for example, Barnett 1953, 1969; Cockcroft, Frank, and Johnson 1972).

Besides history, the impact of current events is also introduced in Chapter Two. For instance, the nature of the externally directed economic and demographic boom in mining that has so dramatically influenced the socio-cultural mood of the school district is examined alongside recent internal changes such as the 1972 unification of River District from five formerly autonomous educational units. In this context, the local values about autonomy and control and outside influences on internal affairs are briefly introduced to be returned to in Chapter Four where they are dealt with in greater detail.

In Chapter Three, as Experimental Schools comes to River District, we begin to see the initial euphoria of the "honeymoon" phase of local-federal relations decline amidst certain confusions and concerns which those relations generated over time. The dynamics of project planning are described, both the strong initial thrust of plan preparation and the eventual bogging down of activities as changes both internal and external to the school district and the project began to be imposed, thus interrupting the best of intentions and plans. Despite the problems encountered and the misunderstandings and confusion which existed during the first year of local-federal relations, a project plan was finally completed and a budget was prepared and submitted to NIE for approval and funding early in 1973. The initial open enthusiasm and euphoria about the prospects for change and improvement in local education were, by the end of this planning year, replaced with very guarded anticipation, perhaps even anxiety about the future of relations with the unpredictable "feds."

In Chapter Four, we take a step away from the chronological and historical events of schooling and project development to describe and analyze the nature of the "cast of characters" involved in the ES program and in the River District project. Here we examine the value orientations of the locals, and the premises for action within the federal bureaucracy. We see the way of life of Wyoming people juxtaposed with the contingencies and constraints of bureaucratic decision making, action, and culture. And we see, in particular, both the school administrators in River District and the project officers from NIE attempting to work together from very different conceptual perspectives. In this chapter, the very real differences in perspective on educational change--local and federal--are highlighted.

Chapter Five takes us back to the events of project implementation in River District, to the negotiations and conflict and confusions of the first year after planning (1973-74) and eventually into the more smoothly functioning but no less dynamic project events of the following years (1974-1976). (The federal involvement in the final years, 1976-1977, is considered minor by comparison; funding for those last two years was miniscule. See Chapter Seven.) Various strategies are detailed--how the federal officers attempted to sway decision-making procedures and planning and early implementation activities in River District and how the locals attempted to keep intact their part of the bargain on their own terms and according to their own understanding of events. In short, this is a chapter which details the dynamic interface of two very different entities. It is also particularly instructive about the internal workings of a rural school district and of its administrators grappling with the very real problems of change. Change in this instance involved more than that imposed and encouraged by the ES program officials in Washington, D.C.; it also included the situational variables of the fast-paced economic boom conditions in the Wyomong mining industry, set against the more sedate and parochial conditions of ranch and small-town life. And, it included the internal dynamics of changing roles and statuses among school administrators brought about as the result of the consolidation and unification of formerly autonomous school districts and the demotion of superintendancies to administrative principalships. This chapter shows how the locals attempted to introduce various innovations of leadership, decision making, facilitation, and coordination into the ES project and, more broadly, into other school system activities. That some innovations failed and were modified or

dropped in no way demonstrates a failure to achieve the goals of ES, but in combination with other situational problems within the school district, they certainly lead one to conclude that the overall record of the ES project was something less than successful in River District.

Evaluation is the focus of Chapter Six. Given that evaluation was one of the primary goals of the ES project locally and of the ES program nationally, it has been singled out here for treatment as a sort of case study within a case study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the obsession with evaluation which commonly exists within American education, and with an explication of evaluation as the ultimate goal of Experimental Schools itself. We examine here the antecedents of evaluation techniques and goals within River District, antecedent traditions which hark back to its historical style or "way of life" discussed and described in earlier chapters. A local style of informality and low key were critical to the eventual development (or virtual lack of development, depending on one's perspective) of a River District evaluation plan and its implementation. The events of that development are chronicled throughout this chapter, culminating in the presentation of the entire ES project plan as the formal response of school district authorities to a state mandate for a plan by which to measure local educational progress and accountability. The chapter concludes with the assessment of local evaluation activities from the point of view of one former NIE official who was employed by River District as a paid private consultant in 1976.

Chapter Seven presents the overall conclusions of the research in River District, oriented around the various constraints and outcomes of the ES project effort there. It describes the declining value of ES

from the local perspective as the problems and frustrations of project development became overwhelming. As an assessment of some of the factors which led to loss of interest in the project, this chapter explains some of the reasons why the locals stuck it out despite the setbacks and discouragement they encountered at almost every step of the way. It describes the various "forces" of change as they were felt and interpreted locally by the principal actors in the school district and as seen and interpreted through the anthropologist's eyes. One of the main themes to emerge in this analysis is that of the clash between local and external perspectives, understandings, premises, and cultural traditions about education, change, and the nature of local control. The dynamic interplay of eastern and western approaches to change, of the "feds" and the "locals," of those in government criticized as "colonialists" and of the "colonists," themselves, is described. Their various styles of operation and their different expectations regarding the nature of change are also further discussed. In short, this chapter presents the major findings of the study in the form of certain lessons to be learned from River District's experience with NIE and Experimental Schools, findings arrived at following the in-depth and intensive examination of the initiation and attempted implementation of educational change at a distinct cultural distance.

Finally, the metholological postscript in Chapter Eight looks back over the entire research endeavor from the perspective of the researcher-author on site. The point of this chapter is quite simply to describe the roles of the researcher and the impacts of his, and Abt Associates', endeavors on the local project, and vice versa. In this chapter, I have taken the opportunity to explain my place in a project where I was ostensibly

to perform my duties unseen, unheard, and uninvolved. It was naive of the research planners, I contend, to have planned an on-site component that was to have no provision for feedback, no impact on local events. The very fact that they intended my research effort to be conducted at a distance, so to speak, demonstrates a basic misunderstanding of the nature of conducting in-depth community and school research in a rural American setting. There is no way that I could reasonably and realistically conduct research in a place like River District, and live there for several years, without having considerable influence over the data and on the outcome of the endeavor being observed. In fact, my presence was considerably disruptive in the long run, as my chronicling of events in Chapter Eight demonstrates. And, in the end, not only did I, as a member of Abt Associates outside research team, have a profound impact on events in this one rural school district, but events both internal and especially those external to River District and ES had profound effects on me and the entire research and project development efforts. Among the most serious external factors affecting the research and the project were, first, the passage of the Buckley Amendment in Congress which raised considerable concern in local school centers about rights to privacy and access to school files, and second, certain major changes in the research ground-rules imposed by NIE, which undermined my hard-won rapport in the district. These two outside factors are detailed in Chapter Eight because I feel that it is important to appreciate events like these, which may, perhaps, be unavoidable whenever applied social scientists allow themselves to be "contracted up" to powerful agencies of change, such as the federal government.

CHAPTER TWO

A PLACE CALLED RIVER DISTRICT

The place called River District, like all of Wyoming, is large and austere, big on geography and renowned for its cattle-and sheep-raising industries and its vast coal and uranium resources. The area has been settled for little over a century, and, although its population is small, since the early 1970's it has grown rapidly with the mining "boom" that has had significant impacts on the region's economy, on traditional values and attitudes about society, government, and education, and on the local Western lifestyle. River District covers approximately 4,300 square miles, slightly more than the eastern half of Spring County, Wyoming, thus being roughly equal in size to the state of Connecticut (to which it otherwise bears no resemblance). This part of Wyoming is a high geographic extension of the western Great Plains. The landscape ranges from snowy peaks of 12,000 feet in the southeast, descending westward and northward down through timbered mountain slopes, out across a vast arid upland, to river bottom lands at an altitude of 6,000 feet. The major river, which bisects the county into its eastern and western halves (and very nearly marks the boundary between the county's two school districts), is an important, although not exclusive, factor in the area's settlement pattern and economic activity. The proclivities for mining and railroading have also influenced settlement and development choices here since the 1860's, when the first towns, ranches, and mines were founded.

All of Spring County's 14 towns (nine of which are in River District) are in the lowlands where the best farmlands for hay and grain production are naturally watered by the river and its tributary streams, and on adjacent benchlands where irrigation is necessary. Westward between the mountains and the river, and further westward beyond the confines of the county, the landscape is essentially arid and level and covered with sagebrush, its monotony occasionally interrupted by craggy rock outcrops and uplifts called "hogbacks." This arid upland is used primarily for grazing sheep and cattle and for strip mining. On a much smaller scale, the timbered foothills and alpine meadows of Spring County are also utilized as summer pastureland and are, as well, the location of tourist and recreational activities, such as hunting, fishing, camping, sightseeing, and winter sports, and of a small logging industry. Both the arid and the timbered regions are inhabited by a variety of large and small upland game animals and birds. Over 80 percent of the county is classified as grazing lands, the vast bulk of which is administered by two agencies of the federal government, the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service.

The school district's climate is dry, cool, and incessantly windy. Average precipitation for the lower agricultural zones is less than 12 inches annually, most of which falls as rain during the spring months. Winter is the dryest season, despite some large snowdrifts and frequent severe storms. The summer months are dry and dusty, interrupted by periodic rain squalls accompanied by higher and warmer-than-average winds called "Chinooks." Mean temperatures range from a low 20°

(-7° C) in January to the mid-60°s F (18°C) in July, but extreme temperatures have been recorded as low as minus 50° F (-45° C) some winters and as high as 100° F (38° C) some summers. River District is, overall, a harsh and generally inhospitable place to live. Its main attractions to modern man have been its underground mineral wealth and its vast grazing lands. At present, industrial development is focused on the rich store of energy resources but humans survive here only because of an ability to corral and capitalize on the meager water supply and to successfully insulate themselves from the climatic rigors. This is a land requiring great expenditures of energy and ingenuity, imposing conditions of hardship and isolation in return, conditions which, among others, have led to the development of a unique Wyoming lifestyle and outlook.

In this chapter, an historical account of the first settlement and economic developments by the early pioneer ranchers, miners, and townspeople of River District is followed by a brief account of the social and educational life of the community to give the reader an understanding of the unique culture of rural schooling in Wyoming in the 1970's, during the course of River District's Experimental Schools project.

SETTLEMENT HISTORY AND CULTURAL ROOTS

River District is shaped by myth, legend, and remarkable historical truths, and by some romanticized notions of its "frontier" and "cowboy" heritage. Its recorded history is buttressed by accounts of personal hardship, perserverance, and accomplishment by pioneer men

and women in pursuit of American goals and dreams such as self-expression, individualism, freedom, and peace of mind. In River District the memories, myths, and conceptions about a century-old past mediate local values and attitudes in the present.

The first residents of the region were American Indians (Utes, Arapahos, and Cheyennes mainly), who claimed parts of what is now Spring County against the white man's encroachments in the 18th and 19th centruies. The Indians themselves were recent arrivals, coming from the Great Plains to the east and the Great Basin to the west. An abundance of wild game, including great herds of bison, attracted them. Although they never settled permanently within the confines of either the present school district or the rest of the county, the vestiges of temporary traveling and hunting campsites abound. The primarily transient adaptation of American Indians to this region attest to its inhospitable environment.

The first whites to arrive, primarily hunters and trappers, came from the east in the late 1700's and early 1800's, also as transients. They were the fabled "Mountain Men"--French, English, and American frontiersmen who "explored the area thoroughly, skinned thousands of beaver, lived virtually as savages, and for the most part vanished from history without leaving an impact, except for a few place names, on modern Wyoming" (Larson 1965:9). Among them were such men as John Colter, Jim Bridger, William Sublette, Jim Baker, and various other competitors and partners of the great furrier of their day, John Jacob Astor. They, like the Indians of the time, did not settle

here. Beyond small periodic trading rendezvous and one short-lived trading post, they established no permanent settlements. None of the present towns of the region dates to that era, and only legends of the men's exploits remain.

Following the frontiersmen came other kinds of white travelers such as missionaries, explorers, sportsmen, and pioneer emigrants who sought land to settle much farther west in California, Oregon, and Washington. The first recorded penetration of the region by these people occurred in 1825 when a combined military and trading exploration party "discovered" a relatively easy east-west route across the land, avoiding the higher Rocky Mountain passes. Today's town of Cow Creek lies close to their route, essentially the same one used by the Indians and the Mountain Men, and within a few decades it became one of the main overland trails used by pioneers in covered wagons and by the stage coach operators and riders of the pony express. Wagon ruts that tell of its heavy use are still visible a few miles north of the town of Spring Creek.

By 1862, the volume of traffic westward had increased so greatly that one fort and eleven stage stations had been established in the confines of what later became Spring County. But it took much more than travelers across the land to give even these transient settlements any permanency. Rather, the region was viewed with strongly negative attitudes, as, in the words of one historian, "a no-man's-land to be crossed over and left behind as quickly as possible" (Burroughs 1971: 3). Nonetheless, change was coming. Following his journey through these

parts in 1846, the traveler Francis Parkman predicted in his book, The Oregon Trail that:

> Great changes are at hand in that region. With the stream of emigration to Oregon and California, the buffalo will dwindle away, and the large wandering communities who depend on them for support must be broken and scattered. The Indian will soon be abashed by whiskey and overawed by military posts, so that within a few years the traveler may pass in tolerable security through their country. Its dangers and its charm will have disappeared together. (1906: 234)

As overland travel increased and the linking of the east to the burgeoning west coast became more desirable, the U.S. government was moved to consider a faster, more mechanical, more efficient means of transport--a transcontinental railroad. By the 1850's, surveyors had arrived in the region, attracted by relatively easy terrain, the discovery of coal, and the availability of timber nearby for railroad fuel and construction. By 1869, the iron rails had arrived and the Union Pacific Railroad, laid east to west, neatly bisected Spring County. Exactly one century later, another road was paved across the same landscape, an interstate highway that paralleled the railroad route, the overland wagon route, the military trail, and the Indian and frontiersmen's path, thereby ensuring the continuing passage of transient travelers across the land.

The first towns in Spring County were railroad and coal mining communities. They included the still-existing towns of Wister and Union in the north and others which no longer exist "end-o-track" boom towns and early mining settlements now labeled ghost towns. The mining towns grew rapidly as miners and land speculators flocked to this part of

the West; and the fame and power of the Union Pacific, which owned the mines and controlled the company towns (as well as vast sections of land along the railroad route), grew as quickly. Besides railroad workers (most of whom continued westward with the laying of the tracks) and coal miners, there were also lumbermen who worked the nearby forests cutting wood for fuel, railroad ties, and houses.

The potential economic utility of the nearby river bottom lands was not lost on these earliest workers, and, in a matter of months after the transcontinental tracks had been laid, some pioneer families began to select homestead sites and to establish water rights. These were the first permanent settlers.

Change gained momemtum in 1869. In that year, territorial government was established for Wyoming, and Spring County was formally organized. Spring County then received its first appointed governing officers, including a superintendent of schools, and the county seat was established in the western portion at Mesaville.

The decade of the 1870's saw tremendous growth in the number of ranches and farms established--both by large-scale ranching companies (well described for this general region in James Michener's 1974 novel, Centennial) and by small family operators. Spring Creek was founded as a ranch service town in the southeastern portion of the county on a spur road running south from the railroad line and adjacent to a hot sulphur spring along a creek by the same name. Other small communities and ranch "neighborhoods" developed farther back into the hinterlands. Some of them were descriptively named, like Bear Creek in Owen Wister's (1902) novel about Spring County, The Virginian. Some names

reflected hardship conditions, like Difficulty, Bates Hole, Brush Creek, Rock River, and Freezeout. These remote localities were often knit tenuously by a network of wagon trails, and their residents were bound to one another, however distant, by the common needs and concerns of frontier life. Often the scattered ranchers were kept isolated for months on end by winter storms and spring floods which stopped all traffic of man, beast, wagon and railroad alike.

Life in Spring County was made all the more difficult by recurrent booms and busts, reflecting the good fortune and the disasters of both the miners and the ranchers. During the 1880's and 1890's, for example, while coal mining boomed, the stock-raising industry was decimated by two severe winters (1887 and 1889) which killed off the large, free-roaming cattle herds. A national economic depression followed in the 1890's. Cattle baronies went bankrupt during these times, and ranching shifted from reliance on the open range to a "retreat...behind the defenses of privately owned pastures and irrigated forage crops" (Osgood 1929: 237; see also Brayer 1943). Besides construction of barbed wire fences and an increase in farming along the bottom lands, sheep herding became a prominent local industry.

All the while the population was steadily growing, most rapidly along the railroad, and the changes that Francis Parkman (1906) had predicted for the region just a few decades earlier were now evident everywhere.[1] Prospecting and active mining exploration were creating even more growth and change. In the southern part of Spring County, for example, gold and copper were discovered in the mountains, and minor "rushes" ensued. The town of Copperton was founded at the center

of a copper mining district where a smelter was quickly built to process the ore. For a while, the boom there inspired wild excitement and exaggerated stories until, overnight, the Copperton "bubble" burst because of financial mismanagement, and the town was nearly abandoned (see Larson 1965: 299-300, 334-335).

These patterns of boom and bust were reflected in surges of population growth. Some of the new people stayed, settled, and formed the nucleus of a population of miners, ranchers and townspeople which remained relatively stable until the mid-20th century.

SOCIETY AND EDUCATION TODAY

Today, within the vast expanse of River District, the two principal industries of mining and ranching still persist; logging, farming, recreation, tourism, and related service businesses in the district's nine towns exist alonside them. The coal and uranium mining industry and miner populations have fluctuated somewhat over the years, mostly since mid-century, following a pattern of growth, decline, and renewed growth that parallels the history of the railroad industry (for which the first coal mines were developed), and more recently reflecting the nation's critical energy needs. Low sulphur bituminous coal and uranium in the form of "yellow cake" are the most important minerals, extracted mostly by open pit and strip techniques. Oil and natural gas are of much less importance, and gold and copper are almost forgotten resources.

Cattle raising and the rancher population, on the other hand, have remained relatively stable since the early boom, bust, and

redevelopments dating to the turn of the century. For awhile, the sheep industry was so important here that the county was nicknamed "Wool County." Today, however, the sheep industry is in decline. Concomitantly, a large number of family cattle-raising enterprises are being converted to corporate, syndicate, or independent modes of absentee agribusiness--modern variations on the old system of local baronies.

River District's 1970 population was 4,139 in a county of 13,354 people. The approximate population density in River District was one person per square mile. Compared with the 1960 census, the population had dropped over 10 percent, reflecting an economic decline, primarily in mining, dating to the early 1950's, when the mines began to close because of a switch from coal-fired to diesel locomotives that reduced the railroad industry's demand for coal.

Since 1970, however, the county's population has increased dramatically, following a revitalization of the coal industry. U.S. Census estimates in 1974 showed an 18 percent increase. By 1978, the population may have increased by more than 25 percent over the 1970 figure, a conservative estimate based on the visual evidence of boom conditions and documentation of increased housing starts and utility installations.

There are 12 schools in River District, situated in eight locales, including seven of the nine towns. Eight are elementary schools, with grades one through six; all but one also have kindergartens. The remote Beer Mug ranch is the site of the district's only one-room, one-teacher primary school. The other four schools are junior-senior high schools. The map on the following page shows the locations of towns and schools.[2]

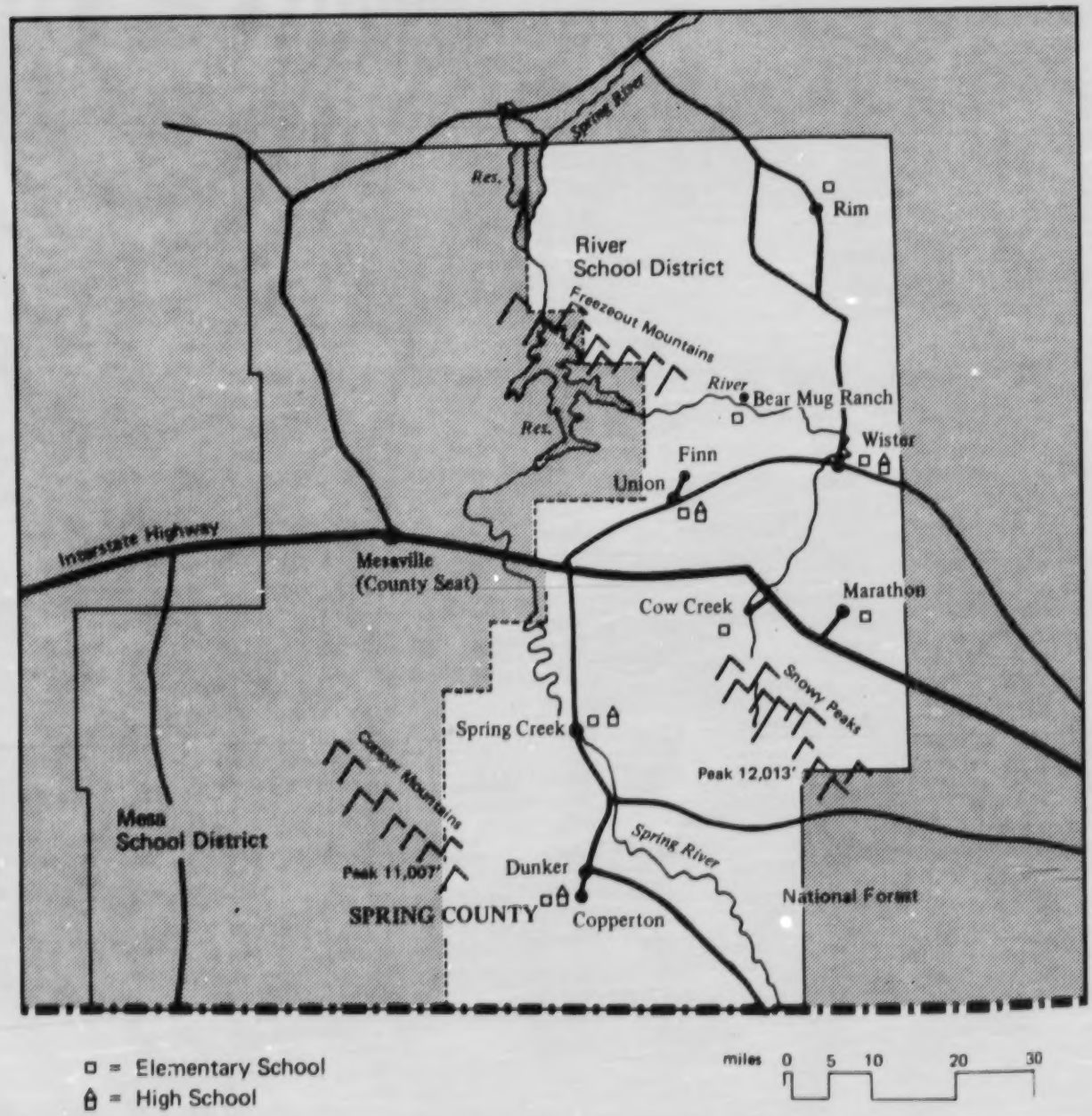

Figure 1. Map of River District

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For convenience, the district may be thought of as divided into two parts--northern and southern--differentiated by distinguishing geographic, demographic, social and economic characteristics. The east-west interstate highway marks the approximate boundary between them, as does the railroad, which it very nearly parallels. The northern sector has three school attendance areas that draw students from six towns and from the vast rural hinterland. Each attendance area corresponds closely to one of the previously autonomous school districts that existed prior to 1972, and each is named after the location of its administrative offices: Union (including the towns of Finn and Cow Creek), Wister (including Rim and Beer Mug ranch), and Marathon. The southern sector comprises two attendance areas: Spring Creek and Copperton (including Dunker), and their vicinities.

The Northern Sector

All six northern towns have been directly affected both economically and socially by recent mining development, primarily in coal and uranium, but also in oil and natural gas. While most of these towns were founded as a result of mining and/or railroading activity in the late 1800's (with the exception of Marathon, 1916, and Rim, 1959), almost all have been affected to varying degrees by the cattle and sheep ranching industries as well. This northern sector today provides the school district with the bulk of its tax base and the majority of its population and pupils.

Union is the largest of the northern towns and has the largest schools. Both Union and nearby Finn are towns of a single industry, coal mining. Cow Creek, a ranching town, lies 14 miles southeast of Union

in a picturesque valley backed by the forested Snowy Peaks. Cow Creek valley is viewed annually by thousands of travelers on the interstate highway which formally opened in 1970. Easy access to the Snowy Peaks through Cow Creek has encouraged proposals for development of a large winter resort which, in turn, has caused considerable controversy and concern about the quality of future environments, both natural and social. Many local ranchers have been highly vocal and successful so far in a fight to maintain the land unaltered for future generations, and to avoid any development that would attract the "undesirables" who they say inhabit the ski resort towns of nearby Colorado.

In contrast, the vast landscape around Union and Finn is marked by a great open-pit coal mine, the transcontinental railroad main line, and a north-south arterial highway that stretches across a treeless hinterland of short grass and sagebrush on which cattle, sheep, and wild antelope graze. Union was founded in 1889 as a railroad-coal company town after the nearby town of Carbon was abandoned. Union, with Finn, grew and developed with a fairly stable economy until severe unemployment set in during the Great Depression. During the war years, the mining economy revived, and there was a promise of a better future until the early 1950's, when the unancitipated switch from coal-powered to diesel locomotives occurred and most of Union's mines closed. The town's population dropped from 1,326 in 1950 to 653 in 1960, and then to 460 in 1970. Several chroniclers of local history have described the diligent efforts of a few old-timers to keep both Union and Finn alive, but, until the early 1970's their efforts seemed futile (Nellis 1974).

National awareness of environment of concerns and especially the "energy crisis" in the early 1970's helped bring the economy of Union, Finn, and the whole school district into a promising new era. Low sulphur bituminous coal, found in great abundance in this region, suddenly became very attractive to midwestern and eastern industry. In 1971, two outside companies joined a third already there to capitalize on the coal resources of Union, and a dramatic surge in economic and population growth occurred. Its effects were only beginning to be felt in the school district when the Experimental Schools project was introduced in 1972.

The economic impacts were clear. While new tax revenue generated by the mining boom promised a bright future for schooling, the immediate increased demands on social and educational facilities were creating serious problems. Union was faced overnight with overburdened public utilities, insufficient housing for the miners, few social services, and mounting debts. Many new residents set up mobile homes and trailers before land use planning, zoning laws, and utility systems could be developed. Many miners sought housing in Wister, Cow Creek, Spring Creek, and Mesaville, the county seat, where housing and social and public services were not much better, and were sometimes much worse.

The impact of the population boom was felt most heavily in the Union area schools, as compared with others in the district. In 1970, the population of Union and Finn together was only 513 people. In the next two years it more than doubled. Cow Creek's growth was less dramatic, but school enrollments in both Union and Cow Creek combined grew rapidly from 216 pupils in 1970 to 374 in 1972, and to 500 by 1976,

for an overall increase of 131 percent. Had there been sufficient housing available in the vicinity of Union, the enrollments would have been much higher. Instead, miners' children began to raise enrollments in other towns of the district, especially at Wister and Spring Creek. Because this trend coincided with the unification of River District and with the district's application to the Experimental Schools program, school administrators were working under considerable pressure to manage a system that was bursting at the seams.

The area from Wister (16 miles east of Union) to Rim (40 miles north of Wister) comprises another of the northern attendance areas, while tiny Marathon makes up the third. Wister was founded in 1868 as a stop on the new transcontinental railroad and was visited early on by Mark Twain, Jules Verne, and Owen Wister, who made it famous in their writings. It grew steadily as a ranch service and livestock shipping center in the late 19th century and was important as a neighboring town to one of the first coal mines in the county at Carbon (now a ghost town of local renown), a few miles south. In the early 20th century, a major highway was routed through Wister, adding to its economic well-being. By 1970, however, times had changed, and Wister was in the grip of a severe economic recession. The railroad no longer stopped at the station, and a new interstate highway was routing traffic well anyway, 20 miles further south and nearer to Cow Creek.[3]

Today, Wister is a secondary residential town for miners who commute daily to Union and Rim area mines (40 and 80 miles, respectively, round trip). In 1970, the population of Wister was 310, and Rim's was 460. By 1976, these figures had more than doubled. School enrollments reflect this new growth.[4]

Rim, founded in 1959, is a uranium mine company town situated at the extreme northeast corner of the school district and the county. Its name, like many other names in the region, reflects a peculiar geographic land formation nearby. It is an isolated and bleak trailer town with an unnatural lack of social development. The nearest center for essential health and social services is over 60 miles away. The local landscape is barren, treeless, and windswept--not a place normally chosen for settling down. Winter storms are frequent and severe, while summers are hot, dry, and dusty.

Marathon, founded in 1916, is the smallest and most easterly of the towns in the northern sector of River District. A tiny oil company in the midst of a stock-raising area, the town's future is severly limited, for the oil and natural gas reserves on which it has depended for 60 years are expected to run out within the decade. The elementary school there has three teachers and 16 students, the children of both ranchers and miners. Marathon has seen no appreciable growth or decline for many years.

The Southern Sector

The southern sector of the River District is noted for its ranching economy and lifestyle, although there are now some new developments in coal and uranium mining nearby which will certainly alter that image in the near future. This sector comprises three other towns and four schools of the district.

Spring Creek is a small but important ranch service, business, educational, transportation, and professional center, and a growing residential community. Its 1970 population was 1,181 but has almost tripled since then. Spring Creek's population consists of both young families and older persons, many of the latter being retirees who prefer this rural small-town life to any other. Its summer population far exceeds its winter population because "summer people"--tourists, fishermen, hunters, and others--maintain summer homes along the banks and the bluffs of the picturesque Spring River, literally crowding the warm summer months with their presence. Part of the attraction is this area's renowned fishing and hunting and its well-known resorts and dude ranches. The local hot sulphur springs have also attracted travelers, health addicts, and bathers since the days of the Indians. Spring Creek was founded by ranchers in the 1870s and is still dominated by a culture and lifestyle typical of the ranching and "cowboy" West.

In the 1950's and early 1960's, Spring Creek also suffered an economic recession, although much smaller than Union's. Two of the major businesses, a combination country club and small inn and a sawmill, fell on hard times and were closed for several years. But the building of a new, larger private resort and subsequent reopening of the country club, inn and mill under new ownership and financing brought the town back to life in 1970. The local economy has been further boosted by construction of a major residential development which has attracted many families from the mining areas father north; their menfolk commute daily the 80 miles roundtrip to and from Union.

It is near Spring Creek that the most change in ranch business--from small family units to large corporate enterprises--has taken place in recent years. And, although this has attracted more revenue from new sources to the town (especially to the new resort and the local country club and inn), it has only a peripheral effect on the overall economy. If anything, big, rich ranch enterprises directed by corporate executives in absentia have led to a decrease in the ranch employment base (cf. Goldschmidt 1978).

Of all the towns in River District, Spring Creek is perhaps the most cosmopolitan. Many people there are relatively new to the West, and they tend to bring new ideas with them and to maintain and seek contacts with the outside world. The town has a relatively young, well-educated, and permanent business and professional population. There is a theater and a bowling alley, as well as full-time dentists, a doctor, and a well-staffed veterinary clinic. There is also a well-equipped airport and flying service and a locally owned newspaper, the Sun. The school district's central offices are housed in Spring Creek and it is also the site of a county-wide instructional materials center which serves as an educational media resource clearinghouse.

Spring Creek has an elementary and a junior-senior high school which rival Union's school in size. Although local school enrollments did not grow as rapidly as Union's when the mining boom began, the anticipation of comparable growth has caused great local concern. Here, as in Union and elsewhere throughout the school district, major school building projects have been promoted to accommodate the change. From

1972 to 1975, local school enrollments were around 500, give or take a little in some years. They have been steadily growing since then.

Copperton and the adjacent hamlet of Dunker are the southernmost towns of the school district. This area was settled by farmers and ranchers in the late 19th century, including a small colony of socially and religiously conservative German Baptists called "Dunkers," some of whose descendants (non-predominantly conservative Presbyterians) still live here. A few of the early copper miners also stayed in this area after the fall of the copper mining industry shortly after the turn of the century. Today, the economy of Copperton and its vicinity is focused primarily on ranching and lumbering, and secondarily on tourism and the outfitting of hunters. Copperton's 1970 population was 321, and Dunker's 46; both have experienced moderate growth since then. If Copperton were closer to the coal mines at Union, its residential growth might have been greater. Nevertheless, a few hardy coal miners still prefer to live in Copperton and commute the 120 miles to and from Union daily. Very recently, Copperton has seen some small residential growth caused by a spill-over from Spring Creek, 20 miles to the north.

Stock raising predominates in the valley and on the mountain pastures surrounding Copperton, but one also finds wheat farming on a large, well-financed, irrigated benchland. One ranch doubles as a very exclusive and expensive summer "dude" resort. The fertile benchlands were first tilled by industrious Dunker (German Baptist) immigrants who dug irrigation ditches with their bare hands and horse power. Family ranching is still practiced by second and third generation residents, and the schools in this part of the district are a singular source of great local

pride, citizen interest, and family participation, especially at athletic events and in such farm- and ranch-oriented youth programs as the Future Farmers and Future Homemakers of America (FFA and FHA) and the 4-H.

Copperton has two small schools under one roof, an elementary and a junior-senior high school. On the eve of school district unification and its application to the Experimental Schools program in 1972, the combined school enrollment was 235 pupils. This figure has increased only slightly since then, well behind the growth of most other district schools.

All five of the River District attendance areas were locally autonomous school districts prior to January 1972. Their subsequent consolidation into one unified River District at that time signified one of the most dramatic educational and social-structural changes in local history, a change which had considerable influence on the district's decision to apply to the ES program in 1972 and on its difficulties with the development and implementation of that program since then.

THE UNIFICATION OF DIVERSITY

The creation of River District in 1972 from five formerly independent rural school systems marks an important juncture between the past and the present. At one stroke, five distinct locales, student bodies, and sets of patron interests and educational designs became one, thus changing the complexion of public instruction, local educational goals, social life and social outlook throughout the district.

The reorganization of schools in Spring County had long been volatile and hotly debated issues, historically a not uncommon condition of school consolidation efforts throughout the nation (see Tyack, 1974, Part I).

The impetus for administrative reorganization of Spring County schools had deep roots, dating to the first formal organization of public schools in 1869, when the county was created and a county superintendent appointed. By 1883, 11 districts had been organized, and, by the turn of the century, the number had increased to an all-time high of 35 separate districts. The large number was indicative of the sparse and widely scattered settlement pattern and the lack of efficient communication and transportation links between towns and ranch neighborhoods during this period. The districts were school taxation units and, as such, fostered a close affinity between the taxpayers (parents of school children) and those elected or appointed officials responsible for the design, direction, and control of local educational affairs. They also fostered an enduring sense of community identity and public pride. The schoolhouse, wrote Owen Wister at the time, "symbolized the dawn of a neighborhood, and it brought a change into the wilderness air" (1902).

Rural school houses generally served as social centers where pie suppers, box socials, dances, church services, Christmas pageants, barbeques, and public meetings were held. Each school had its distinctive name--"Tin Can," "Bunker Hill," "Brush Creek," "Beaver Creek," "Leo," "Sullivan Ranch," and "Beer Mug," for example, as well as "Dunkard" and "Finn" schools, after the German Dunkers (or Dunkards) and the Finns. There was even a "Little White Schoolhouse" near present-day Cow Creek.

Ranch schools were widely scattered, and poor financing, combined with the difficulties of wilderness travel, led the resourceful pioneers to adopt a range of strategies to ensure that their children were satisfactorily educated. Some schools operated for only a few months of the year. Winters were so generally severe that many distant ranches were cut off, and, in some instances, ranch children from a general neighborhood would attend a centralized summer school. In one part of the county, a traveling school was operated, using a log cabin that was easily erected, dismantled, and transported from ranch to ranch at three-month intervals. Education of the young was so highly valued that virtually no hardship would stop the early settlers from devising some sort of schooling system. Those ranch families more intent on having their children properly educated in established public institutions would often send their sons and daughters to town, where they roomed and boarded during the winter months with relatives or friends so as to be able to study daily at the school--a practice still employed in the most rural areas of River District.[5]

The early schools were poorly supplied. Various accounts (see Conner 1964) paint a graphic picture of the typical schoolhouse as "only one roomed and in winter . . . had a pot bellied stove for a heater." Inside, the lighting was poor, and furniture was meager at best. "A large blackboard usually covered one end of the room, with chalk and erasers.... At first a dictionary was about the only reference book. On each desk were a slate and pencil." What few textbooks were available usually included a Barnes or McGuffy reader. "Outside . . . [was] usually found a horse stable and an out of door toilet. Drinking water was supplied

either from a nearby irrigation ditch or from the creek some distance away. Water bucket and tin dipper stood in one back corner."

The need for better public school facilities and more efficient administrative support was recognized early at all levels--local, county, and state. Whenever talk of consolidation was heard, it met with both diligent advocacy and bitter opposition. In the 1930's, for example, the advocates of school consolidation and reorganization were most often townspeople who viewed the issue in terms of the benefits, both financial and educational, that would accrue to their enlarged schools. They compaigned with little tangible success on a platform stressing the advantages of "administrative adjustments which may better equalize educational costs and opportunities" (Knudson 1937:1). But, anticipating the opposition, one of them predicted with uncanny accuracy that:

> The establishment of a large unit system of education in Wyoming will not be immediately or readily realized. Years of education, planning, reorganization, and consolidation will be necessary before the people of the state will realize the tremendous advantage of a large unit system of organization for the schools. It seems that the thing most cherished is the illusion of 'local control.' What price local control, if it does not bring greater service and decreased cost? (Knudson 1937: 195; original emphasis)

On the other hand, opponents, among them some rural ranchers who harbored a distrust for the motives of both townspeople and school administrators, questioned both the utility and the morality of taking their children out of the rural neighborhoods by busing or boarding them in town for months on end away from home and hearth. They saw in their rural schools another kind of educational efficiency, one based on smallness, and felt that the one-room schoolhouse somehow embodied a more intimate, personalized, and individualized approach to education

(the epitome of what many modern educators are striving, today, to recreate!). The opponents were also quick to realize that any consolidation of schools would preclude their accustomed oversight and direct control of how their hard-earned tax dollars were spent on education.[6]

Some sentiments of opposition, as well as of quiet acquiescence to change, are implied in the following anonymous reminiscence about rural schools in earlier days:

> Happily these rural district schools were quite efficient. The teachers were dedicated to their work and succeeded in their efforts to instruct and inspire. Students did receive a good basic foundation for higher learning. Teachers were able to give personal attention to their pupils which is difficult in larger classes of greater numbers....
>
> Well before the turn of the century organizations and offices for public instruction were established.... Before long all areas were under the guidance of County School Superintendents and a uniform course of study put into effect. Rural schools soon began to keep pace with the larger groups. Slowly better textbooks were added to the meager supplies and general equipment improved.
>
> After a time, as a final step, school busses were purchased and used to transport rural pupils to and from the larger graded town schools.
>
> Consolidation took place and the little country schools became but a memory. (Conner 1964)[7]

Perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of the amalgamation of rural schools into larger schools units was the degree to which rural ranchers lost their "say" over the management of school affairs. One elderly retired rancher with a half century of parenthood and years of experience on rural school baords expressed this typical opinion about government in general, and school governance in particular, both past and present:

> Well, I'll tell you, those people are bureaucrats . . . they are not of the people. The government we've got now is not a government of the people--it's a government of bureaucrats for bureaucrats. Even in our [unified] school district here, the people have nothing to say about their schools, nothing at all! (Personal interview)

Loss of control is one reason why, as the unification of rural schools increased from the 1930's onward, more and more ranchers stood for election to the consolidated school boards throughout the county. Many of them were successful, and a predilection for rancher-trustees is still evident on the present-day unified River District board of trustees.

During the 1930's, efforts toward school consolidation at both the local and county levels successfully reduced the number of districts in Spring County for 35 to 28. But it wasn't until after the state's first comprehensive school reorganization law was passed in 1947 that the number of local districts was further reduced. Ten years later, there were 17 districts; by 1965 there were ten, and by 1969 only eight. Of those remaining eight districts, three were located in the western half of the county; the five in the eastern half were soon to be unified as one River District.

The Wyoming School Organization Act of 1969 signaled the final blow to true "local control" of small rural schools. The law required sweeping administrative reorganization to "eliminate the different types and kinds of school districts . . ., [to] replace them with unified school districts, . . . [and a] wiser and more efficient use of public funds for education" (Section 106). This plan caused enough concern in Spring County to eventually unite ranchers and townspeople alike in its

opposition. All components of this opposition were subsumed under one issue: the loss of local control.

Financially, the patrons and taxpayers of several small independent districts, some of which had a strong economic base by state and national standards[8], feared that their monies, once removed from their control, would be dispensed to the poorer, larger schools of the county.

Politically, the residents of the less populated, smaller (although in some instances much richer) districts feared that their best interests would be submerged under the controlling interests of larger, more densely populated and more powerful (typically poorer) units. Some thought that "equalization" under the law meant an inevitable reapportionment of trustee election districts (which approximately corresponded to the five former school districts), which would shift the balance of local representation from the dispersed to the more densely populated areas.

And socially, there was an abiding fear that behind the mandate to unify was some sort of covert plan, hatched in the state government offices in Cheyenne, to close all the smaller schools and consolidate their student bodies to form larger ones. This sort of threat to a focal point of community spirit in the small towns and rural hinterlands, already undermined by previous consolidations, and the specter of busing children even father and longer from home to school, created a highly emotionally charged atmosphere.

In short, equalization of educational opportunity, the most positive aspect of the change emphasized in the reorganization law, was not the central issue in the towns and ranches of Spring County at all. Rather, it was issue of local autonomy and community identity which created

the most controversy and resistance.[9] Although united and loud, the opposition delayed but did not ultimately prevent the inevitable. During a cold Wyoming winter three years later, on January 20, 1972, by legal fiat in the form of a writ handed down from the State Board of Education, River Unified School District was created.

CONCLUSIONS

Rural Wyoming is a large, beautiful, harsh place to live. One poet has captured the feel of it:

> Take time for far horizons, stretch the eye
> For tranquil largeness, prodigal, remote;
> Measure by sky and distant slanted showers,
> Cool shadows languid on the buttes, slow hawks,
> The small occasional flash of antelope rumps;
> A distant, drifting speck, a man on horse,
> Threading the nameless rims and nakes knolls
> On silent hoofs, soundless upon a bluff,
> Ancestral unit, mounted, isolate,
> Like something lost in ways half mythical.
>
> What of that horseman lost in pathless grass,
> Moving in silence, microscopic, lone,
> Passing beyond, unnamed, casual in space?
> Does he reflect: This older way is best;
> The slow, firm earth, the rims, the grassy hollows?
> And I, here unmolested, taste my days,
> With time to pace the rhythm of the skies,
> And sun, and elemental vagrant winds?
>
> More likely, jogging on, not wasting words,
> He hides a hard attachment and a bent
> For elbow room and space. Crooking his knee
> About the saddle horn, he shifts his weight,
> Sways lightly on, considers food and drouth,
> And where to bed, and where his cattle graze.
> (Wilson Clough, 1956: 56)[10]

Wallace Stegner has caught the essential spirit of these high plains in prose:

> Desolate? Forbidding? There was never a county that in its good moments was more beautiful. Even in drouth or dust storm or blizzard it is the reverse of monotonous, once you have submitted to it with all your senses. You don't get out of the wind, but learn to lean and squint against it. You don't escape sky and sun but wear them in your eyeballs and on your back. You become acutely aware of yourself. The world is very large, the sky even larger, and you are very small. But also the world is flat, empty, nearly abstract, and in its flatness you are a challenging upright thing, as sudden as an exclamation mark, as enigmatic as a question mark.
>
> It is a country to breed people, egocentric people, perhaps poetic people. But not humble ones. At noon the total sun pours on your single head; at sunrise or sunset you throw a shadow a hundred yards long. It was not prairie dwellers who invented the indifferent universe or impotent man. Puny you may feel these, and vulnerable, but not unnoticed. This is a land to mark the sparrow's fall. (1962: 8)

In both these comments about the land, man plays a prominent role as the purveyor of a certain kind of quiet understanding about beauty, life, loneliness, inanimate nature, and human nature on this desolate fringe of the Great Plains. In each is evoked a kind of timeless quality about the countryside in this far hinterland of western America.

Most of the people who come here merely pass through. It has been that way throughout recorded history and before. They hurry by, transients moving between other worlds quietly and without impact, outsiders who neither want nor are asked to stay. The locals seem to prefer it that way. The few who have stayed and survived here quickly hardened themselves to the difficult natural environment and quietly accepted the conservative social climate. Many of them want most of all to be able to live their

lives here unfettered by other people's demands and dilemmas, unimpacted by outsiders, in control of themselves and their local institutions. They are patient in their austerity, and they value industriousness, ingenuity and, perhaps most of all, tradition.

Yet, this romantic picture is inaccurate and incomplete, for many of the same people also seek change, improvement, and progress as contradictory as that may seem. What they want often requires new ideas and resources available only from the outside, so they seek help and assistance where they can find it. Quite often, it comes from agencies of state and federal government, helping to enhance local business and economy, to assist local law and order, to preserve or reclaim some portion of the physical environment, and to improve local institutions, like the schools.

On the eve of the Experimental Schools project in 1972, two forms of outside involvement in local affairs were affecting and radically changing the structure of local schooling. One was the state-mandated reorganization and consolidation of local rural schools. The other was the concurrent boom in the coal industry. The first brought a whole new order to the design and management of public instruction. The second engendered a rapidly increasing population and soaring school enrollments, along with an influx of new money, especially in the form of school tax dollars. Both had profound effects on all subsequent events in the schools --in the form of overcrowding and subsequent expansion of the physical plants, and of a reordering of educational system's goals, managerial systems, and administrative hierarchy.[11]

When the first announcement of an ES program competition arrived in River District only two months after unification, the precise effects of the expanding economy and increasing population could only be guessed at, and the exact nature of the reorganization of schools and school system governance was still being carefully designed and very cautiously initiated. Above all in the minds of the educational officials in River District was a desire to create a climate of unity to carry them through the difficult days of change, restructuring, and growth that they were entering. In the concept of Experimental Schools they perceived a chance to achieve that difficult goal.

CHAPTER THREE

EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOLS COMES TO RIVER DISTRICT

In mid-March of 1972, two months after River Unified School District had been created, the first word of an Experimental Schools (ES) program for small rural schools arrived on the superintendent's desk in Spring Creek. The ten-page flyer from the federal government[1] announcing the competition for selection as an ES project site was received as both an unexpected and a hopeful event, for it suggested an opportunity to solve at least some of the immediate and long-range problems that local educators and administrators faced in trying to truly unify their new district.

The superintendent shared the flyer first with his administrative staff--an assistant superintendent, four area administrative principals, and a head teacher--the core of the new district administrative council. As they read and discussed the program description, they began to think that an ES project in their district might well facilitate a smooth transition from five disparate school districts to one cohesive educational system under combined management.

Administrative consolidation already had been accomplished, if only by legal fiat, but the consolidation of local public opinion, of systemwide goals, and of program development and evaluation was still to be done. And, given certain factors in the school district's natural and social environments--its largeness, a long and bitter fight over consolidation, and concurrent boom conditions in the coal and uranium industries, to name a few--attainment of a comprehensive and sound educational program, a better education for all, promised to be difficult at best.

The ES program, as local administrators understood it, promised useful outside help and financial incentives for change that could offer some relief of the new district's many problems--just the sort of potential vehicle for unity and catalyst for change and development they were seeking.

ES IN THE BEGINNING

The ES program competition offered River District an unusual opportunity. The announcement stressed the importance of citizen participation in needs assessment and local planning for comprehensive change.[2] It promised five years of continuous funding and required comprehensive research to evaluate and analyze the local effort and results. An assessment of the new district's educational needs had just begun and so was well-timed, it seemed, to dovetail with ES project planning should River District be selected for funding from among the many competitors.[3] According to the announcement flyer, ES planning would, by design, facilitate bringing educators and school patrons together from all corners of the new district, which in turn, might help instill a desperately needed sense of public unity and support toward the newly organized school system. The administrators' attentions were also drawn to other parts of the program description--to its financial and political incentives, and to its philosophical orientation.

"Each Experimental Schools project receives funding for five years," they read, plenty long enough to knit the new district firmly together as one. The individual projects should be concerned "with questions which relate to local needs and goals," the flyer stressed, much to their liking. Experimental Schools "will continue to maintain

flexibility regarding the design and requirements of the program in the future," a promise of minimal interference and rigidity. And, furthermore, because they often felt caught in the shadow of programs defined by and modeled for non-rural schools, the local educators were especially attracted to this promise on the first page of the announcement:

> [The] search for quality by rural schools may not, in fact, be found by following the models of large urban and surburban schools, but rather through designs which capitalize upon the unique characteristics of small rural schools.... The Experimental Schools program, through this competition, is making available the opportunity for a limited number of rural school systems to test new ideas for educational improvement which are developed in and for a small rural school setting.... In that way, those who try new ideas, as well as those who look forward to doing so, will know what succeeds and what does not succeed in the quest for improved quality education in rural schools. (emphasis added)

Then, and later during the early phases of planning which followed, local educators commented favorably about how "pleased" and "surprised" they were to find such a sincere commitment by the federal government to long-term funding, local involvement, and flexibility. This program, at least, seemed to stand apart from what local school persons perceived to be the typically rigid designs, tight monetary controls, and inevitable outside agendas (which ignored local desires) that seemed to characterize most government programs they knew about. To be sure people in River District were not entirely free of skepticism, largely because of the past history of Wyoming federal/state problems, and of stressful local school involvement in federal education programs. But they saw a chance in the ES program to work together to develop something new and meaningful for local education. Their next step was to take their enthusiasm directly to the River District board of education.

The nine-member school board met on March 20th. Members of the board, the elected trustees who were mostly ranchers, were not nearly as enthusiastic about ES as the school administrators seemed to be. Their opinion was "favorable, but guarded," as the assistant superintendent later characterized it. Having been conditioned by a traditional distrust of federal involvement in local affairs, a historical legacy of compromise by Wyoming in affairs involving the eastern establishment (Larson 1965), the school trustees spent considerable time that afternoon and evening discussing the pros and cons of the competition. As one observer later recalled, they were concerned that federal programs of this sort always seemed to have hidden agendas--"strings," as they called it--that inevitably got tangled up later. Furthermore, knowing that personnel turnover in the federal bureaucracy is typically high, they reminded one another that any agreement which they might make under one official might just as likely be reneged or renegotiated under the next. The trustees' feelings were summed up in the oft-heard local refrain, "Never trust the feds!"

Nonetheless, this program, unlike others with which they were familiar, seemed to promise a minimum of interfering outside controls: "no strings," in local parlance. And, it seemed particularly refreshing to the school trustees that, despite the requisite "comprehensiveness" of local project design that was alluded to in the flyer, nothing in the announcement seemed to seriously threaten either their cherished local traditions or the authority structure of the new school system. Local

traditions and local control are highly valued commodities in rural Wyoming, and being alert to preserve them is serious business, especially where government interference might be an issue.

Furthermore, the potential for success or failure seemed not to dominate the rhetoric of the announcement as much as a sincere demonstration of willingness on the part of rural school leaders to try to improve local education. Overall, the ES program appeared to be potentially more beneficial than detrimental. A local newspaper publisher, a man who later served as chairman of the district-wide ES project planning committee, expressed his understanding of the ES program in this way:

> The original idea was that here's a project that you can [use] to change your education system or improve it <u>without any strings attached</u> from the government. The school board and the administration had shied away from some of these other federal projects because they gave you the money, then [said] you have to do this and this and this. This one was sold on the idea that . . . money was in the form of a contract . . . [and] it wasn't [to be] paid back--just a contract. 'You do this, and we want to use you as an experimental school to see if that would apply to other schools and change them....' (personal interview)

That the ES competition was worth entering was generally agreed upon at the March 20th school board meeting, and the trustees voted with near unanimity (seven to one, with one absent) to support the superintendent's request to proceed immediately with the preparation of an application. The application deadline was only a few weeks away, and, since application implied no firm commitment, they felt that they could easily withdrawn their support later if it became necessary.

PLANNING THE PROJECT

The letter of interest which was sent in application to the ES program was completed by April 8, 1972. Though hurriedly prepared, it was, nonetheless, impressive, clear in style, candid in its discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the new district, and honest in its appraisal of the need for change. It expressed the district's willingness to spend some of its own resources on innovative programming for educational change, and it stressed community involvement in planning and a philosophy of flexibility and individualized instruction. In all this, it reflected the rhetoric of the program announcement, the requisite "buzz words," the right jargon, as well as a positive and aggressive tone designed to attract attention. In short, it demonstrated a high degree of grantsmanship on the part of the superintendents most responsible for its preparation. As a description of fact, need, and new direction, it was thought by some to be a seminal statement about the new school district. One administrator later described it as "well written, well received, and extensively used as an overall guide" in later planning efforts.

Part of the last paragraph of the letter exemplifies its overall tone and direction:

> We would like to develop . . . an educational program based on individual and local need, interest, and initiative . . . with district-wide impetus, planning, coordination, fiscal control, and evaluation. We . . . want a program which fully uses local community resources to meet locally defined needs . . . without duplication of effort or facilities among the various communities. Our program . . . meet[s] time, facilities, resources and talents of people effectively and efficiently.... [It is] based on flexibility, change and growth as a result of continuing evaluation.... We are convinced that River

> District is a unique situation with the necessary prerequisites where the development of quality education for all can be obtained through planning, effort and funding, and this within a quality environment.

The letter was clearly designed to sell. On June 20, approximately three months later, a secretary interrupted an administrative council meeting to deliver a telegram from Washington, D.C.; River District had been awarded a one-year planning grant of $46,500. "There was general elation," one of the council members later said, "and all opinions expressed were positive." All of the administrators shared in the superintendents' pride of success and satisfaction over the prospect of at least one and quite likely five full years of funding for change and improvement in local education.

A few weeks later, in July, the two superintendents and one trustee flew to Washington, D.C., to meet with ES officials to discuss the research, evaluation, and documentation components of the program. At that meeting, the idea of "comprehensive" change in all facets of school district operations--a primary concept of the ES program--and the process of preparing and writing a project plan were discussed in detail. School officials returned home feeling quite euphoric about the prospects of an ES project in River District. The superintendent expressed these good feelings in a note to his school board members:

> We were pleasantly surprised to find that there are no guidelines and that in this project we will be able to do what we want to do, not what someone else thinks we should do. The only restrictions are that proposed programs be comprehensive and are within the ability of the district to finance if successful, when the federal support is phased out.

The administrators began immediately to prepare a detailed "plan of attack" by which the district could meet a December 15th first-draft deadline and a February 15th final draft deadline for submitting the project plan. The school board promptly appointed the assistant superintendent as planning director and appointed a local teacher to assist him in "documentation, evaluation, and in providing data for citizens, staff and student groups working on project planning." Simultaneously, the area principals were urged to begin work to promote the project among community groups in their respective locales.

In August, River District was visited by two officials from the ES program offices in Washington, D.C. Their goal, in part, was to assist local officials to prepare for the planning phase, in order to ensure progress toward the December and February planning deadlines. They suggested that the district begin by approaching the nearby University of Wyoming for help in preparing a formal educational needs assessment on which subsequent planning efforts could be based. They also advised that a local citizen committee be formed to help guide the planning process over the next few months to ensure citizen involvement from the beginning, since citizen participation in planning, implementation, and evaluation of the ES project was another major objective of the ES program. The two advisors made a third suggestion, that "town meetings" and "coffees" be held throughout the district in order to further engage citizen interests and to encourage broadly based and active participation. District officials considered these options seriously, and expressed enthusiasm about each.

To negotiate with university staff, the superintendents traveled to meetings in Laramie on three occasions during August and early September. There they talked with faculty in the College of Education and the Department of Psychology about local needs and objectives. Within a few weeks a Prof. M_____ designed a preliminary proposal for himself, as principal investigator, and two graduate assistants to conduct a year-long systems analysis and needs assessment in River District. This plan was taken back to River District and presented to the school trustees during their early September meeting, since the trustees had the final say in all matters of contracting with outside researchers and consultants. The university plan was discussed at some length, but--as will be discussed below--was summarily rejected, and the search for outside help was temporarily dropped. It was nearly six months before outside help in preparing the plan was again sought from the university.

Meanwhile, the second suggestion by the ES advisors, that a local citizen committee be formed to help with planning, also met with initial enthusiasm from the administrators of River District. But, when it was brought up for consideration at the September board of trustees meeting, it, too, was rejected. In fact, the trustees were unanimously opposed to any formative citizen involvement in school affairs. This matter, like that of outside help from the university, was shelved for several months before its reconsideration the following December. Planning would proceed, instead, under the direction of the assistant superintendent, without a committee structure per se.

The third suggestion of holding town meetings and informal coffees provided a forum for eliciting the necessary citizen opinions, and, unlike the committee and the university help ideas, it was successfully implemented.

News of the project was also spread at student council meetings, during school visits by administrators and trustees, at teacher gatherings, on radio, in the local newspaper, in letters, and through various less formal, interpersonal networks which knit all corners of the large district together. According to one account, over 500 people were contacted in 75 semi-formal or informal meetings alone, all across River District.

Despite their best intentions, however, and the long lists of potential programming and curriculum goals elicited from citizen meetings, the assistant superintendent and his assistant were not prepared to write the first draft of the project plan by December 15. And, as December approached, they and the other administrators became concerned and alarmed, both at the lack of progress in formalizing a plan and at the speed with which the first deadline was approaching.

During October, November, and early December, several problems bearing directly and indirectly on local project planning efforts emerged to cast the first serious doubts on the nature and success of River District's involvement in the ES program. Most of these difficulties were internal to River District and they were blamed, in part, for the slow progress toward a final plan.

They included, for one, a lack of success in securing university help and for another, a similar inability to implement a citizen planning committee. These difficulties were viewed by local administrators planning the project as serious impediments to progress. At issue were factors like cost and time, as well as a deep-seated concern on the part of the trustees about the school board's role in district planning and decision making. Given the newness of the consolidated district, its past history as units

with local autonomy, its immense size, and the disparity of economic and political characteristics among the populus, the trustees seemed unwilling to delegate their authority and responsibility to anyone, least of all to either outsiders or unelected local patrons. The administrator-planners were unable to change trustee opinion in these matters, a reflection of local public opinion, until some time later.

Concern with the wide variety of views and opinions from the people of the district reflected the disparate nature, generally, of River District as a place. Geographically, the district encompasses an area of over 4,300 square miles. In 1972 its population was small and scattered --fewer than one person per square mile throughout the isolated ranch neighborhoods and the nine tiny mining and ranch service towns. There lived ranchers, coal and uranium miners, small town businessmen, and loggers; oldtimers and newcomers alike, all of whom paid their taxes and sent their children to twelve different schools clustered in seven of the district's towns and on one remote ranch. These people have been traditionally of one voice on the issue of "local control" in public affairs. But, given so many localized and specialized economic and social interests, their opinions on how school taxes should be spent and how and what their children should be taught were, and still are, difficult to assess and cope with in the central administration of schools. Managing a newly consolidated education system under these conditions, let alone planning a major experimental education project with federal involvement, was burden enough in 1972. But allowing more voices and more opinions beyond those of the administrators, the trustees, and the federal project officers, seemed to be unproductive and unmanageable.

While reminiscing about this later, some local administrators rationalized the failure of the board to accept the university research plan in the following ways. For one, they were unanimous in feeling that the plan was too formal, too lengthy, too complicated, and potentially too costly. The cost concern, especially, was difficult to justify to fiscally conservative trustees and patrons. Furthermore, it was feared by some, at least, including administrators, that graduate research assistants might use the data in dissertations, and that this sort of academic self-interest would conflict with local needs and expectations. Some administrators and trustees also wondered how the local school district could expect university personnel to commute the 200 miles round trip to River District, particularly in winter, over hazardous mountain roads.[4] Some questioned why the people of River District themselves could not do the assessment for local planning.

As they later reported to federal officials, "The district would consider evaluation planning after input from citizens, teachers, and students had begun and that other sources than the university would be used in developing the plan...." Indeed, local citizen input was considerable during the first few months of planning, although it was secured informally rather than through any formally structured committee work or as part of a formal research activity.

Concerning the citizen committee idea, administrators argued strongly that a formal committee was essential to help guide and eventually focus the disparate views and opinions of the district's scattered patrons. They envisioned the committee of active and concerned citizens, representative of the district at large, continuing to work in an advisory and

evaluative capacity during implementation of the project. Involvement of this nature from start to finish would not only assist the administration, but would fulfill a major objective of the ES program for active citizen involvement throughout the project. Why, then, was the citizen planning committee idea rejected so summarily by the school board?

While it was clear that the administrators generally favored the idea of a formal citizen planning committee, several of the trustees had had negative experiences in the past and voiced their disdain for citizen involvement in educational affairs generally. After all, as they said time and again, "Aren't the trustees the elected representatives of all the people of the district?," and "Is not our primary responsibility as a school board to plan the best education possible for all the people in all parts of this district?" One trustee offhandedly put it this way: "A citizen committee is about as useful as a hump on a camel!" To this skilled horseman, struggling over the hump on a camel, like working with a citizen committee, was simply a nuisance to be avoided.

The minutes and notes from the September 1972 school board meeting (below) reveal how the two parties to the debate felt about formal citizen involvement, and how difficult it was to obtain consensus on the issue.

First, the assistant superintendent outlined the proposed committee's duties and responsibilities. He pointed out that a cross-section of the entire school district community was needed in the project, and that, following widespread discussions with patrons, smaller sub-committees representing each attendance area within the district would review and assess the practicality of their suggestions from a local perspective.

Each sub-committee would then "establish what proposals are beneficial" for its attendance area, after which the district-wide committee would meet to determine what programs from the list should ultimately be included in the final ES project plan.

> Assistant superintendent: "The district committee will establish the priorities for the program. After these priorities are set, they will be presented to the school board."

Some trustees questioned the wisdom of this plan.

> First trustee: "The district committee would not have enough information to make a decision on the necessary priorities . . . and the board would merely be a rubber stamp, and therefore . . . [it] would not be doing its job.... The district committee would not be effective . . . The school board should establish the priorities in this project . . . If [the trustees] do not know what the people want, they are not doing their jobs as school board members."

> Second trustee: "If the priorities were established without the board taking part, the board would be in a difficult position . . . The board [should] set the priorities for the project."

The superintendent countered with an argument favoring formation of the citizen committee.

> Superintendent: "Such a committee would give a greater opportunity for more citizens of the community to be involved with the project . . . Such committees give the citizens a chance to get together and exchange ideas . . . and usually some very good ideas are brought forth . . . The board [members] should attend as many committee meetings as they possibly can [to allow them] a definite part in helping set the priorities for the project."

In response, some board members voiced the opinion that, since the school board was working to operationalize the newly consolidated district, and because the ES project was considered to be an integral part of those operations, the interests and responsibilities of such a

citizen committee would, at this time, overlap its own. After a long period of debate, the matter was shelved indefinitely to allow time for both sides to reconsider the issues involved.

Meanwhile, the coffee-and-town meeting approach was successfully implemented. There, in formal settings that were loosely guided by the local planning director, the people freely expressed their opinions about the new school district's needs and about priorities for the ES project. All opinions were recorded and, in time, long lists of suggestions were compiled.

This approach worked well because it was typical of the way things normally get done in River District. Informality was the key (see Chapter Six). The relative informality of local meetings and interpersonal contacts along local networks fit into an acceptable image of a low-keyed no-cost, straight-forwardness. Neighborhood, community, and school gatherings and announcements are essentially non-controversial, and non-threatening; they cost virtually nothing except personal time and interest and the question of their being controlled by outside interests is not at issue. They appear to simply happen, and they naturally work to spread the word and involve the widest range of individuals at the lowest level of the democratic process.

By the first of December, the project planning director had prepared a master list of ideas generated throughout the school district community about the ES project. Ideas on the list included new programs, improvements to existing programs, and needed services. Curriculum items topped the list--classes in recreation, the environment, and culture; sex education; and vocational and on-the-job training. Other suggestions

included implementing speech and reading therapy, mental health and guidance services, adult instruction, improvements to sports and athletic programs, and the introduction of more individualized instruction. The development of mobile classroom units was also widely suggested as one means of introducing specialized and expensive laboratory programs (welding, plumbing, electricity, and electronics, for example) to all schools in the district at the lowest cost.

Not only was the list long and cumbersome and in need of pruning, but some suggestions reflected the narrow concerns of small constituent groups. Planning can have a certain "lightning rod effect" in that it attracts everyone's interest and input. It creates an arena for the expression of self-interest where people can insert their pet ideas, their aspirations for themselves and for their children, their biases, and even themselves into the new program. "Planning certifies who [and what] is important" (Sproull, Weiner and Wolf 1978: 37). In River District it did all these things, with the result that the planning ideas for the ES project were as diverse as the number and type of particular local concerns of each community group.

For example, a formal program in mechanical-vocational training was requested by residents of the coal mining town of Union, ostensibly to prepare high school graduates for direct entry into mine employment. And, improvement of vocational-agriculture ("vo-ag") facilities was requested by ranchers and farmers of Copperton, who wanted their sons and daughters to be well-prepared to stay and work the land. On the other hand, a call for more academic courses was heard from the more cosmopolitan residents of Spring Creek, who apparently saw a college career as the best

option for their children. These suggestions reflected the economic orientations of each place--Union, a mine town, Copperton, ranching country; and Spring Creek, a commercial center and the school district's administrative headquarters.

Yet, despite all the meetings and suggestions, a workable project plan was not yet ready for submission by the fast-approaching first draft deadline of December 15. Conceptualization of goal priorities and a project management structure, with accommodations to the internal social and political contingencies of the new district, eluded local planners who were still several months from completing their task. River District's planning was clearly moving at a slow pace.

Looking back over the first six months of planning, from June to early December 1972, several occurrances, both within the local planning effort and in the ES program offices in Washington, D.C., can be seen to have affected the pace of planning in River District.

Locally, it was clear to the administrators of the school district by December that some sort of formal citizen committee was needed to sort out the many suggestions and to select the most appropriate and potentially most successful goals for implementation in the ES project. Not only was time running out but there was a concern that, if final choices were made and the final plan were drafted by an administrator in the central office in Spring Creek, that a person might be accused of catering to one or another special interest group in the district. Simply letting a citizen committee iron out the discrepencies in local public opinion and mediate potentially volatile disputes over whose ideas were eventually selected for the project seemed the easier way around the problem. With

this in mind, the administration went back to the school board in early December with a plea for reconsideration of the appointment of a citizen committee. At this time a compromise was made and a committee with limited responsibilities was created.

The new committee was called a "district coordinating committee." Its role was defined as strictly advisory, thus allowing the trustees to retain their corporate role in all formal decisions. The citizens of each community were urged to meet and select three representatives, including one teacher, to serve on the district coordinating committee. Members of the district-wide committee were then charged with two major tasks, as described in the final project plan some months later: They were "to be actively involved in the development of the project from beginning to end," and "to serve as contact sources in each community so that all community people might keep informed as to the progress of the project." In the following weeks, this advisory group sifted and sorted all the planning suggestions, selected and defined a limited number of goals, and began writing the first draft of a project plan.

Somewhat earlier, in October, an internal problem related to project personnel had arisen as yet another obstacle to effective and speedy planning. The assistant superintendent, the man who had written the initial letter of interest and who was primarily in charge of ES planning, resigned and left River District quite unexpectedly. (He left for personal reasons and his formal resignation was accepted the following January 1973.) He was replaced as the planning director for the ES project by the area administrator in Spring Creek on a temporary basis, but he was not permanently replaced as the assistant superintendent of schools for

another nine months (until July 1973). According to local accounts, his sudden departure in October resulted in a loss of momentum in planning at a "most critical time."

Added to the internal problems of creating a citizen committee and unexpectedly losing the planning director was the overriding problem of sorting out personalities, power, roles, and responsibilities within the new district itself. Given that the former superintendencies (of the previously autonomous districts) were now reduced, nominally at least, to administrative "principalships," some of the area administrators were struggling to assess and reassert something of the power and prestige they had formerly enjoyed as independent leaders. One of the area administrators' new duties in three of the former districts was to act as the elementary principals. One outspoken administrator, opposed to having his image tainted by this seeming demotion from the ranks of superintendent, flatly declared that he was not the elementary principal, that the position was for all intents and purposes, vacant--although he seemed, nonetheless, to get the job done. (More of the dynamics of this internal structural issue are discussed in Chapter Four.)

A personnel change at the federal level of the ES program also occurred, further complicating and slowing local planning somewhat and, ultimately, leading to confusion and conflict between local and federal officials. In November, a new federal project officer was assigned in Washington, D.C. to monitor River District. This new officer, the second of four assigned between 1972 and 1976, was much more aggressive than her predecessor. She insisted on having more direct involvement in local planning and she quickly flew to Wyoming with an NIE-employed consultant

to visit the site and to get a first-hand view of River District. While in Spring Creek, she discussed the need for a formal statement or concept around which future planning should be developed, insisting that a central theme of "individualized instruction" be submitted in the forthcoming draft of the local plan. It so happened that this concept was also attractive to the local planning director who had recently implemented it, himself, in the schools at Spring Creek. The project officer apparently left the district feeling reasonably sure that a central theme of individualized instruction would be forthcoming in the next report to Washington and in the plan. (As will be noted below, when it was not seen again, she became upset, and federal-local relations took a plunge.)

After the project officer left, the local planning director took her idea of a central theme directly to the recently formed district coordinating committee for its consideration and approval. However, they objected to using any one specific instructional approach as an overall theme for the district, especially one already so closely identified with the Spring Creek administrator and his school. Rumblings of "Spring Creek gets everything" were already being heard in school district headquarters; for the Spring Creek area administrator, who was now acting planning director, to push his own pet idea as a theme for the project would simply be too much for others in the district to accept. Therefore, another theme was chosen, one which reflected no particular area of educator's interest and which was an encapsulation of a more widespread concern--the district's continuing need for coordinated action and unity. The new theme allowed for the development of "an educational progam

based on local need, interest and initiative yet with district-wide direction and impetus in planning, coordination, fiscal control, and evaluation."

On hearing of the change, the consultant who had accompanied the ES project officer on her visit expressed understanding and support, but the new project officer did not. In a terse letter received a few weeks later, she explained that as the new central theme stood it was "a statement of method of coordination rather than a statement of focus for the development of an educational program." It did not indicate goals for planning specific programs, she said, and its implications for comprehensive change were unclear. It simply would not do.

But, a "method of coordination" was precisely what the local planners wanted as their "focus for the development of an educational program" and a unified school district. To them, coordinating and unifying local interests through the ES project would be a timely response to local district needs.

Under pressure from the ES project officer, however, the members of the newly established citizen advisory committee ultimately backed off and agreed to a compromise theme, one which gave primacy to neither "unity" nor to "individualized instruction," per se. Rather, it was a theme encouraging "the development of a community involved educational program that emphasizes a future oriented learning environment for each student and his individual needs." After being so stated, it was quietly forgotten.

At issue was not the wording of this one-sentence theme, but a concern about federal versus local control on its inception and writing. Having to do "what someone else thinks we should do," in the words of the superintendent some months earlier, was the issue.

Local officials began to wonder just how much say the ES officials in Washington, D.C., and particularly the new and agressive project officer, were ultimately going to have in the final disposition of the local project. Federal input was both welcome and unwelcome, actually, depending upon the circumstances and who initiated the contact (i.e., with the caveat that the locals would decide when and on what account federal help would be called in). The issue of federal involvement was two-sided: there were times when the local school officials definitely needed it, expected it, and encouraged it, and other times when they wanted nothing to do with it.

An example of local need for federal advice and help occurred immediately after the flap about the project's central theme. During December and January, local planners sent several queries about certain technical points of the project to the federal project officer in Washington. When their questions went unanswered and planning was further delayed as a result of it, local frustrations began to mount. Finally, in late January, with the February 15 final plan deadline only a few weeks away, the superintendent of schools formally requested more time for River District to prepare its plan. In particular, he, his planning staff, and the coordinating committee were uncertain about what was wanted by the ES program in the way of an evaluation design. The locals needed advice on evaluation and more time from Washington before they could continue and complete their planning effort.

At first, the project officer refused to allow the requested extra time. But in a few days, a second response from her provided a generous extension of the project planning period, from February 15 to March 30. Help with the conceptualization of evaluation was not forthcoming, however, and in desperation, local school officials turned once again to the University of Wyoming for assistance. This time they made a short-term contract with an educational evaluation specialist, a man only slightly acquainted with River District and the ES program. In a few days, he prepared an evaluation scheme that was duly incorporated into the final 78-page document entitled "River District Experimental Schools Educational Plan." The plan was nicknamed the "Brown Book" after the color of its cover, and was submitted on time at the end of March, along with a five-year budget request for $596,000. The local planning committee and school administration officials could only sit back then to await the acceptance or rejection of their bid for full Experimental Schools project funding from federal officials.

THE FINAL PLAN

River District's project plan, the "Brown Book," was accepted, but only "provisionally" in May 1973, two months after its submission. (The provisions under which ES officials accepted the plan for funding will be considered in Chapter Five which describes project implementation.) The plan represented the concerted efforts of the district administrators, educators, and patrons to design a guide for the implementation of changes and improvements in classroom education based on a local assessment of need. And, although later difficulties with the project tended to

divert administrative energies away from schools and classrooms, the original plan still served nominally, at least, as a basic format for implementation throughout the five-year life of the project.

The plan listed five major components and addressed "comprehensiveness" in terms of six facets suggested by the ES program in announcing the ES competition.[5] The components were designed to be implemented district wide in all grades and were, ostensibly, to reflect the district's central theme and to achieve the goal of comprehensiveness.

The five components of the River District plan were:

> Career education: To provide additional educational opportunities for students in order that they might discover and develop interests, attitudes, abilities, and aptitudes which will fulfill future occupational requirements and responsibilities.
>
> Special services: To provide special services so that each student might better understand and adjust himself to the physical, social and psychological world in which he lives.
>
> Cultural education: To provide for greater exposure to cultural experiences for each student and the community.
>
> Curriculum evaluation and coordination: To implement an on-going evaluation tool that will give direction, meaning, and coordination to all phases of the curriculum.
>
> Community involvement: To provide for more effective community participation in the schools.

These five components arose from four local concerns: (1) a perception of the inadequacy of rural education to prepare rural youth to compete with urban youth for jobs, (2) the isolation of rural areas and small towns which limits rural residents' exposure to the fine arts, (3) a perception of a need for greater interaction and communication, and (4) a desire to

unify, or at least coordinate, the newly consolidated district's educational and administrative operations.

As required by ES/Washington, there were six "facets" of the school system to which the district administrators were to address themselves in planning comprehensive educational change. The six facets listed in the announcement of the ES competition were: curriculum; instruction and staffing; community participation; time, space, and facilities; organization, administration, and governance; and evaluation. The list that appears in the district plan differs slightly, however. For one, in the district plan there is no facet in the plan called time, space, and facilities. Secondly, the district list includes an added category called instructional materials which deals with video equipment and other items available through the local instructional media center. And thirdly, instruction and staffing are listed simply as staffing on the district plan (instruction being collapsed, presumably, with curriculum). Also, in the local plan community involvement is listed as both a facet and a component, indicative, perhaps, of its importance locally.

Among the district's curriculum facet objectives were the implementation of career and cultural education as instructional programs to be integrated within existing classroom activities and courses. Some details of the career and cultural curricula were listed in the plan, but since there were no courses *per se* designed around any of the component topics, few specifics in the way of curriculum development were provided. Rather, the plan listed suggested activities for integrating component topics like fine arts and career awareness into the existing school curricula. For the most part it was assumed that curricula would somehow

naturally develop as the project was implemented. As a consequence, curriculum development is one of the weakest parts of the River District plan.[6]

Curriculum coordination, however, received particular attention, but was confused with the overall evaluation effort:

> Since this is a recently re-organized school district drawing into a common district operation school districts which have been functioning for a number of years as individual school entities, it appears that an in-depth status study or survey of the present curriculum is a necessary first step toward the development, adoption, and implementation of an on-going evaluation system which can routinely provide the data and information for decision making.
>
> The proposed curriculum evaluation scheme is presented in four phases; briefly:
>
> Phase 1. Initial Status Study (comprehensive curriculum survey).
>
> Phase 2. Utilization of status study findings within present project activities, overall project evaluation program, and assessment program.
>
> Phase 3. The development and adoption of an on-going curriculum and instructional evaluation program.
>
> Phase 4. The implementation of the on-going curriculum evaluation in respect to district priorities, evaluation design, and state requirements.

The objectives of the instructional materials facet emphasized the need to upgrade each school library with career and cultural education materials, and to coordinate the ETD satellite program[7] in career education for junior high school classes district wide. Essential to this facet was video tape recording and playback equipment for use in every attendance center, to be purchased out of the ES budget and administered through the already established instructional media center at Spring Creek.

Under staffing objectives were the hiring of new personnel and staff training. The major objective of this facet was the hiring of guidance counselors for the four attendance centers with high schools. Also planned were the selection of a project administrative staff which would include a director, coordinators, and a secretary, and the development of summer workshops to train staff.

Community involvement objectives were somewhat vague. They have become known by several titles--i.e. "community education" and "community schools"--and were subject to varying interpretations after they were written. The district coordinating committee, as one manifestation of several designated forms of community involvement, was intended in the plan to "continue to exist and function" during implementation, meeting "on a minimum of twice during each school year." Over time, "community education" became broadly conceived as another form of community involvement, integrally related in the plan to career and cultural education components, and designed to encourage active citizen participation in in-service staff training workshops and in bringing careers to the classroom. It was intended that the coordinator for this facet of the plan be hired from an internship program through an out-of-state university. The role of the "community schools intern" would be to coordinate all community involvement and to design and implement a program of community education whereby public school facilities would be open to community members for evening classes in a variety of subjects. This "community schools" program has been defined as "a true indication of the desire of this project to involve the community."

No specific objectives were stated under the facet of organization and administration. Rather, the plan reviewed various organizational roles

in the new district such as those of the school board, administrators, and district coordinating committee. Positions for an ES project director and subordinate project staff were also included in plans for implementation. The lack of specific changes in this facet was a reflection of the fact that the district's system of administration and governance was already undergoing considerable reorganization as a result of recent school district unification, and district planners did not see the need to design further changes for purposes of the ES project.

Evaluation was considered important enough to warrant an entire chapter in addition to being included in the curriculum facet. However, serious consideration of the need for formal evaluation techniques was delayed (for reasons discussed in Chapter Six) until the spring of 1974.

Given the detail and direction of the River District Experimental Schools Educational Plan, district officials felt ready to begin formal implementation of the project through workshops during the summer of 1973 and in classrooms district-wide at the beginning of the academic year in September.

CONCLUSIONS

> When either an innovation or an alien importation first makes its appearance, it does not do so in a vacuum. There are certain situational features connected with it which predispose those to whom it is introduced either to accept or reject it. (Barnett 1953: 313)

> Every new organization is influenced by its legacy. (Sproull, Weiner and Wolf 1978: 108)

ES application and planning got off to an encouraging start in River District during 1972. Because of recent school consolidation and the formal demand (by state officials) to make significant changes in the quality and equality of educational opportunity in the new unified River

District, local administrators had a built-in impetus for change. They responded positively and aggressively, and when the announcement of an ES competition arrived, they took the initiative to respond optimistically and with fervor. Between March and June 1972, they drafted a competent Letter of Interest in less than four weeks, and succeeded in winning a one-year planning grant. Successful application led the district's managerial staff to think positively about the potential future of the ES project in and for River District. Some, especially the top administrators, spoke of it as a potential forum for much needed improvements and as a catalyst for unity and change in the new district.

Barnett, who reminds us in the quotation cited (above) that change and innovation do not occur in a vacuum, also speaks at length about certain psychological factors and personality types which are preconditions for acceptance of change. "Advocate prestige" is one such important factor (1953: 321). Perhaps as part of their new roles and in their search for prestige and status within the newly reorganized River District system, the superintendents and administrative principals, working together as an administrative council, were predisposed to look favorably for help from such a "good thing" as the well-financed federal ES program. In a district struggling to put itself together while sorely constrained by the financial impact of consolidation and rapid growth, as well as the potentially disruptive effects of patron disunity, a successful bid for outside monies with built-in incentives to design a concerted, "comprehensive," and unified program of better education seemed worth the effort. Furthermore, the implicit assumption about ES of "no strings" and the program's overt commitment to local planning and implementation--translated locally as "local control"--made the whole package all the more attractive.

All of these factors generally obscured, for the time being, an underlying current of suspicion and distrust of federal involvement in local affairs. (However, that distrust and concern would re-emerge frequently as the project progressed.)

Another undoubtedly important factor in the successful application and planning efforts in River District was the obvious commitment on the part of the administration to community involvement. Citizens were involved at every stage of plan preparation, despite some resistence from the trustees. As we will see in Chapter Five, the willingness to involve citizens beyond planning became less apparent as implementation proceeded after 1973.

The obvious shortcomings of the planning process and the final plan, however, must also be pointed out. For one, the active involvement and firm commitment of teachers--those ultimately responsible for implementation of ES in the classrooms--was not well cultivated. Most of the real energies were expended at the top--by the administrators. Furthermore, there is little evidence of the involvement of students beyond some early meetings with student council members when the ES program was first being introduced in the district. And, solid plans for curriculum development and its coordination among the schools were generally absent from the final plan.

Nonetheless, the euphoria of success pervaded much of the planning period, a period which may be likened to the so-called "honeymoon phase" of organizational development. Early in their development, fledgling organizations such as the newly unified River District need and expect a fairly non-restrictive environment for growth, a time "when few external demands are placed on the organization..., [a] period [which] allows an organization

to pursue the process of getting organized in an undisturbed manner" (Sproull, Weiner and Wolf 1978: 109).

The "honeymoon" of federal-local relations in River District was not undisturbed, however; hence, it was short. External pressures on River District from ES staff members, particularly during the winter of 1972-1973, as well as such internal problems as personnel turnover, the impact of overcrowding in the mining town schools, and the financial strains derived from rapid growth and the reorganization itself, all intruded on the steady growth and stabilization of the system. Sproull, Weiner and Wolf warn that, "If the early intrusions are many or severe, they leave little time for the organization to stabilize, to institutionalize its responses, or to begin to initiate its own contacts with its environment." And, if the early development stage is plagued with hard times, "these features may interact in such a way that the agency" difficulties are exacerbated" (1978: 109). Difficulties did plague River District in 1972 and early 1973, and even more lay ahead following acceptance of the local ES plan by ES officials in May. (These are considered in Chapter Five.)

Understanding the social and cultural environment of the River District project is an essential prerequisite in the quest to understand the overall dynamics of project development. Therefore, I will digress in order to look more closely at the immediate context--the situational features of culture and social structure--of the local and federal organizations involved in Experimental Schools. Their different "cultures" set the stage for the various actions and reactions of local and federal officials toward one another. The following discussion will help explain, for example, the concern of the trustees about overt involvement by both

citizens and other "outsiders" in River District school affairs. Likewise, an examination of the bureaucratic arena of NIE and ES in Washington, D.C., will help elucidate the obviously tense, sometimes aggressive, and often confusing behavior of ES officials toward River District in the months immediately following submission to federal officials of the formal result of the district's planning efforts.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS: LOCALS AND FEDS

Values, in local parlance, are that which is deemed to be good, right, respectable, socially and morally correct. They are the standards by which to judge the "fit" of a man or woman to society: "Is he or she honest, hard working, a family man or a good wife and mother, god fearing?" Values, value orientations, value systems--these are not precise, measurable concepts or empirical facts. Yet values do exist and they can be identified simply by asking, watching, and listening. Human reactions to public events and public statements suggest what is valued and what is not. For example, when a political candidate advertises ancestral ties to the historic past; when an environmentalist is labeled a "meddling outsider;" when a popular federal official is characterized as being "a Westerner, after all;" or when the school calendar is written to accommodate church activities--local values are being expressed. Values establish the boundaries between what a community honors and what it abhors, mediating various ritual and social acts of inclusion and exclusion, validation and invalidation, exaltation and degradation (Szasz 1970: 260ff). Values are, in short, premises for action.[1]

Under ordinary circumstances, values are implicit. But the characteristic values of individuals, communities and institutions become highly visible in situations of conflict and tension. Some of the basic value orientations of the patrons and administrators in River District began to emerge, for example, in the school district unification controversy, (described in Chapter Two) during the difficult year of planning the ES project, (Chapter Three) and to a degree in the controversy surrounding my place in the community (Chapter Seven). Cultural attitudes about

societal and governmental activities, in particular, became quite clear during the implementation and evaluation phases of the ES project beginning in 1974 (Chapters Five and Six).

In this chapter we digress from an account of the events of ES in River District to examine the social and administrative structure and organization of the "locals" and "feds," the principal characters in the Experimental Schools drama in River District. We will look at their different sets of values and attitudes, the motivations and mediating patterns of their belief systems and their understanding about human and organizational behaviors, and the premises underlying their actions and interactions with each other over ES. In short, we will examine the socio-cultural characteristics and contexts of the two educational bureaucracies involved--one small and local, the other large and national--and the bases of their power and authority.

My thesis is that culture, as acquired knowledge, is shared and used by people in identifiable groups to interpret experience, make decisions, and generate social behavior and action.[2] The description of culture in this case begins with the predominant perspective of this book, the values expressed by the people of River District, and moves on to explain the social structural arrangement of the principal characters in the local cast, namely the school trustees and the administrators whose decisions and actions, as well as whose indecision and inaction (mediated by group values), did much to steer the course of ES events. Finally, the discussion turns to the structure, operating permises, and behavioral style and role of the National Institute of Education and its Washington-based officials assigned to monitor the ES project in River District. This discussion sets the stage for a clearer understanding of events occurring at the conjunction of two social and bureaucratic entities operating at a distinct cultural distance from one another, and of some

of the basic differences between the metropole and the rural periphery of American society.

OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS IN RIVER DISTRICT

River District has been described in Chapter One as a large, sparsely populated, isolated, harsh (yet beautiful), rural, western American place, far from the mainstream of contemporary urban life. Its people's attitudes and their values--their culture, essentially--is different from that of the East. Its residents are basically either ranchers, miners, or townspeople engaged in various business or public-service occupations, including that of running the public schools. The differences among these three groups of local people, and some of their similarities, are sketched below.

Ranchers

Briefly described, ranchers are the permanent base of the population. They hold the strongest historic ties to the region's past. They are the primary land owners, and, not surprisingly, espouse conservative political views and have a pragmatic and conservative economic outlook. Ranchers are very active in government at the local level, and invariably run for election to the school board, for example, where their decisions ensure the maintenance of local traditions and long-cherished values. Similarly, they often aggressively seek office or appointment to positions which would enable them to directly affect decisions about the land-based resources and the local economy (e.g., the Board of County Commissioners, the land-use zoning commission, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's local Soil Conservation Service District, which they control). Where they

are not in a position to control decisions which affect the allocation and development of local resources, they are vociferous in voicing their opinions, such as at public hearings about wilderness allocations held by the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management.

Socially, the presence of ranchers and their families is felt most strongly in the churches, both Protestant and Catholic, in fraternal and sororal organizations such as the Masons, Eastern Star, Job's Daughters, and Rainbow Girls, and to a lesser extent in local civic clubs such as the Lions International. Generally, ranch family and social life are bound together around the economic enterprise, the ranch, as well as the school. Among ranchers, pleasure and recreation tend to reflect the agricultural center of their lives: their tendency is to choose leisure activities which are the same as, or very similar to, their work activities.[3] The close alliance of economic, social, political, and educational affairs is the hallmark of rancher life, as expressed in their full participation in, support for, and management of, such school-aged membership associations as the 4-H and the Future Farmers and Homemakers (FFA and FHA) groups, the Ranchers' Family Camp Meetings held each summer, and the County Fair which rounds out the agricultural season each fall.

Some activities like county fairs, livestock shows, and auctions may be characterized as "integrative ceremonials," associations that "symbolize community integration" (Bennett 1969: 81). These integrative ceremonials typically exemplify the rancher ethos and value orientation. Ranchers staff the county fair board of directors and plan and supervise all fair-related activities. One fair board member described this, the most important event of the year, as a combination of education, recreation, and entertainment, in that order of priorities. It brings ranch and

farm families together at the county seat from across the entire county for a week. For them, the livestock, farm produce, and homemakers' expositions and judging competitions are the main events. A rodeo on the last day is also important in that it attracts the most outside attention and nets the most profits, but it is dependent on outside contestants and entertainers and is attended, in the main, by non-ranchers. The same fair board member estimated that 80 percent of the rodeo audience is comprised of townspeople and miners. Some of the same educational, recreational, and entertainment features of the county fairs are found at the private livestock shows which local ranchers attend on their neighbors' ranches, and in regional and national centers such as Denver, Omaha, and Phoenix.

Miners

Compared with ranchers, the miners of River District are more transient as a group, responding flexibly to new job opportunities and "boom" conditions as they occur. It was the rapidly expanding coal mining industry which had attracted most of them to River District. Although it was mining, as much as anything, which first opened this region to settlement a century ago, only a small number of today's area residents can trace their roots to that era (Nellis 1974). Most of the miners live and work in the town of Union, Finn, and Wister (as coal miners), at Rim (uranium), and at Marathon (oil), and a great many others commute daily from as far away as Spring Creek and Mesaville, the county seat (see Figure One, Chapter Two).

Because of their basic transience, few miners ever become seriously involved in local political affairs or seek election to political office.

Hence, they tend to have little effect as individuals or as a group on the disposition of local resources or in the operations of local government. Their employers, the big mining companies, of course, have considerably more impact given their large proportion of the local tax base and their clout in energy resource legislation at state and national levels.

Family and social life and leisure, for most miners, stand well apart from the economic enterprise, and their pursuits of pleasure revolve around relaxation, personally restorative activities, and recreation.[4] They tend to participate in pleasurable activities which take them well away from their jobs--for example, in boating (on nearby reservoirs), fishing, and hunting, which are extremely popular here--and in social club activity which promotes such outdoor recreation as snowmobiling and horseback riding. Churches and bars are also highly visible and significant accouterments in the lifestyles of some (usually separate) settlements of the miner population.

There are few truly integrative associations or ceremonials among miners, either in their social lives or in relation to their work. This reflects their basically fragmented style of life. The labor union, which is often a central integrating force in mine communities elsewhere, is not overwhelmingly popular in Wyoming where a right-to-work law prevails.[5]

Knudsen (1937) has characterized the basic distinction between Wyoming ranchers and miners as one between landowners and permanent residents on the one hand, and renters and transient residents on the other. Given these basic differences in tenure of land, he posits that differences in cultural expression between the two groups will appear, and cites as an example the different attitudes which ranchers as landowners and miners as renters tend to hold toward the finance and governance of schools:

> landowners are usually conservative and permanent people much interested in the payment of the bills incurred by school districts. Renters, on the other hand, seem to be a class of people not interested in how the bills for public expenditures are paid, and for that reason are often willing to demand the best in educational facilities, and are equally willing that someone else pay the bill.

Because most miners' families will be moving on soon, they have little inclination or opportunity to become immersed in school district affairs. Consequently, their impact as a group is felt less at the administrative level of the school system, and more in terms of constant pupil turnover in the classrooms.

Townspeople

Given the rough distinction of permanence versus impermanence between ranchers and miners (greatly oversimplified here for the sake of brevity), townspeople (non-miners and non-ranchers or retired ranchers) tend to fall on the side of the miners in terms of the work-leisure spectrum, and on the side of the ranchers in terms of other values such as permanency and local investment of time, money and interest. Townspeople include businessmen and small industrialists, school employees, and various local, state and federal officials or civil servants.

Copperton, Dunker and Spring Creek in the southern sector of the district, and Wister in the north are basically ranch service towns, despite the mining boom and a recent influx of new residents. Many of the residents of these towns are former ranchers or ranch children themselves, who have retired to town or moved to town or returned after college to pursue town-based professions. Their dress, mannerisms, speech, and demeanor reflect the region's ranching heritage. For the most part, people who live in the ranch service towns of River District epitomize rancher values, sentiments, and cultural interests, reflecting the historic dominance and, for many, the pure romance of the cowboy way of life.

Townspeople are active in many of the same associations as ranchers--the fair, camp meeting, and agricultural youth groups, the county historical society, the civic-minded Lions club, the chamber of commerce, and the amateur archaeological society. Among them, living at the various centers of school district operations, are the administrators, teachers, and uncertified staff who carry out the daily business of running the schools, following the policy directives of the ranchers-dominated school board.

VALUES IN RIVER DISTRICT

The River District "way of life," then, is predominantly based on the ranching ethos. Some of the values which characterize this way of life are not limited to River District, of course, but are the local expression of values found throughout much of agricultural America. They mirror an intimate sense of community and are the expressions of the so-called "Protestant Ethic," described below. Regardless, the people of River District feel that they are a people apart in attitudes and life-style from most non-local people and from outside institutions which represent the American mega-culture, such as the federal government, big business, the mass media, and even the larger towns and cities of Wyoming and the surrounding region.

This feeling of distinctness, the personal identification with their own community and a way of life, not only sets the boundaries for the local value system, but becomes in itself part of that system. It is considered a positive attribute to have been born in River District, or to have lived there a long time, or at the very least to proudly call it home as a settler. Insiders share memories of bad times and of good,

of times "when game was more plentiful and people more scarce." They share a deep feeling for the land which they wish to pass on unchanged to their children. They share an attitude towards outsiders which, while not hostile, is not necessarily welcoming either. (More than one local person has been heard to make disparaging remarks about people from "east of the Mississippi.") Only a sensitive and skillful outsider can become established in the local social system, and the mark of a successfully integrated newcomer is an ability to articulate local values. Adroitness in the local idiom, ability to comply with the local code of behavior, and a willingness to make River District "home," are, taken together, signs that an outsider has breached the line between exoteric and esoteric wisdom.

From the local point of view, outsiders seem not to understand the state and its people, the austere beauty of the land, and the values of its residents.[6] To the extent that outsiders have power to make decisions affecting the locals, they are particularly resented--in part because they <u>are</u> outsiders (and "they should stay that way") and in part because their actions reflect different values.[7]

At root, the River District way of life is reflective of adaptations to material constraints imposed by the local environment and by history, and is perhaps best generalized in terms of a popular construct, the Protestant Ethic.[8] The anthropologist John Bennett, studying a population of Canadian plainsmen whose cultural expressions are much like those in River District, has described the Protestant Ethic at work. Its basic elements, he writes, are the "virtues of thrift, sobriety, concealment of violence and conflict when it exists, and a genial, neutral manner of behavior," manifest in "conscientious work and a sustaining economic enterprise" (1969: 6, 167).

These elements of the Protestant Ethic are positively sanctioned and seldom, if ever, questioned in River District. It is an ethic appropriate to a sparsely settled rural region where hard work and self-sufficiency, and straight talk and action, are necessary to survival, where the family (not the corporation) is the primary economic unit of production and consumption, where one person's involvement and participation (or the lack thereof) can affect the outcome of any endeavor.[9]

In practice, the River District way of life forms an integrated set of beliefs and behaviors, but for purposes of discussion, several component parts can be isolated and examined, although their interrelationship will be readily apparent. Work, individualism and cooperation, localism and stability are River District values which contrast sharply (in local eyes) with the perceived values of Washington and the Eastern establishment in general, and which help to explain school district actions and reactions during the planning and implementation of the ES project.

Work Ethic

Hard work is the basic criterion for successful endeavor in River District, reflecting in part the material constraints of the environment and in part the cultural baggage that immigrants carried with them to the region from their earlier Euro-American experiences. Work is at the root of the Protestant Ethic ideology, according to sociologist John R. Kelly, who writes that "work is good and leisure is valued only as it contributes to work." And, as has already been noted about the rancher orientation to work, "Life is of a piece with work at the center" (1972: 53).

But not all work is equally valued. In ranching culture, work is not compartmentalized from other aspects of daily life; rather, they blend

together as one. Hours are long, vacations almost nonexistent. The contingencies of the job make it so--ranch animals require constant attention.

Moreover, work--and the worker--can be evaluated in terms of what is produced, and the products of the rancher's labors are easily visible. Other kinds of work are judged by these standards. Work which is not time consuming and which does not yield a visible or tangible product is hardly work at all. Physical labor is highly honored, and financial and business acumen run a close second; both theorizing and bureaucratic "paper work" are, in contrast, highly suspect. Bureaucrats are sometimes perceived as being non-workers in the projective sense, contributing to too much government, which is negatively valued. A rancher who was well acquainted with me once characterized the bureaucratic sort of research enterprise I was engaged in as "like retirement," a form of non-work. Another time I heard a farmer say, "Bureaucrats talk for a living. We work!"

Individualism and Cooperation

In the American West, individualism is bound up in isolation and association, both of which permeate the town and country ethic.[10] River District people are isolated of necessity. They live widely scattered in towns or ranches and are often cut off from one another and the outside by the contingencies of distance, time, bad roads, and inclement weather. But isolation notwithstanding, they are not anti-social; neither distance nor the ethic of individualism completely separate them. Association and cooperation are also highly valued. Service clubs, churches, sororities and fraternities, and professional organizations are popular, and participation in them is typically active at state and national levels, beyond the local scene. A number of local individuals have gained national fame in various social, civic, and trade associations. Ranchers in particular

make good use of organization membership to establish themselves in wide social networks of like-minded people. Their cattlemen's, wool grower's, and similar farm-based associations are especially noted as economically and politically powerful organizations, and as such they frequently serve as springboards to elective public office for some members.

Local people are not intrinsically adverse to becoming involved, individually or collectively, in state and federal programs for economic, social, or educational development. But those who participate in their various organizations and associations or who make contractual obligations with government agencies expect to do so voluntarily, and reaction against government infringement on local affairs is typically strong (cf. Kraenzel 1955).

Localism, Local Control and Stability

The three interrelated values of localism, local control and stability have been noted in River District and in similar North American agrarian social settings. Bennett notes in a setting similar to River District that the typical rancher's "pride in his stability and localism is the valuational aspect of his economic adaptation" (1969: 185). Localism, in fact, may be one of the most pervasive value themes in the West, if not in all of rural America. Schultz has noted that for eastern Oregon ranchers, for example, localism (which he calls "independence"), defined as wanting to be free from external control and regulation, "is purported by ranchers to be the central theme upon which their 'way of life' is constructed" (1972: 81). In River District, the concept of local control and independent initiative pervades local government, politics, and social life.[11] Likewise, an inherent conservatism, a longing for stability as opposed to change, is a constant theme, despite the considerable change

resulting from rapid energy resource developments in the district. One recent observer of the Wyoming scene has put it this way: "There is something unhappy here...something unsettling--a fear that a way of life is dying, and with it, a certain dignity" (Redford 1976: 634).

Many people in Wyoming believe that they have been "colonized" by outside big business and government, and there is a legacy of suspicion toward outsiders. As the prominent Wyomingite, Walt Reynolds,[12] has put it:

> We share the fear...that decisions will be made by people not familiar with the area. And they will be wrong most of the time. The powerblocks in Washington treat us as colonies. They are aliens to our locality and would run us under standards that they are accustomed to from a different society. (Quoted in Hicks 1974: 6; emphasis added)

The citizens of Wyoming have long felt that the federal government should maintain a low profile with as little local involvement as possible, particularly in the area of public education. Some have even branded state and federal meddling in local education as "socialistic practices!" (Larson 1965: 570). Nonetheless, federal aid to education has been as much sought after as it has been the source of criticism and partisan strife.

LOCAL VALUES AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Given the various value orientations of River District people, especially the ranchers, it is interesting to examine how these valued are played out in the arena of local and local-federal school affairs. Policy and administrative action in River District are designed and carried out by an elected board of trustees and a council of appointed administrators, headed by two aggressive superintendents. It was the combined energies of these two groups, but mostly the administrators, which went into the planning and implementation of the ES project. Their work on ES began shortly after the new district was organized in 1972.

Unity was the overriding concern of the officials of a new and potentially volatile consolidated district who served concurrently as those most responsible for the operation of the ES project. They sought unity in terms of patron support for the project, in the planning and development of its goals, and ultimately in the management and operations of the entire school system. But, despite the finality and abruptness of the school consolidation order, and the sort of clean slate that the ES planning grant seemed to present to them, unification did not occur over night. What began during the winter of 1971-72 was a gradual process of readjustment and reformulation of school system goals and structure. Quite frankly, if federal officials were seeking stable, well-functioning rural districts in which to try out the Experimental Schools design, they made a poor choice in River District. During the spring and summer of 1972, and for all the rest of the years of the project, for that matter, there was relatively little stability in which a plan of action like that submitted to NIE in April 1973 could be implemented with reasonable success.

The establishment of unity of purpose and action where only diversity and individual autonomy had existed before was a singularly difficult task. As we shall see, the school board as a group worked long hours to achieve consensus, and the public display of working together which they sought and their corporate unity is a good example of one part of the Protestant Ethic in action. But the administrators as a group were really much more divided than they appeared to be. Because of changes in the administrative hierarchy due to consolidation, and because of past animosities and rivalries over scarce power and prestige in the new district, tensions within the district sometimes were high. This ultimately affected the development of the ES project. The administrators were, however, very effective in shielding their differences from public scrutiny,

partly because they were not required to hold public meetings as the school board was. Above all, an image of unity of purpose and action was to be maintained.

School Board

The final order to reorganize to create River District came from the State Board of Education in December 1971, setting January 20, 1972, as the start-up date for the new system. In the few intervening weeks, a school trustee election was hastily conducted, and a new nine-person school board was created comprised of eight men and one woman.[13]

As they defined it, the trustees' jurisdiction would be policy making, but in the next few months and years the trustees also took active interest in district administration and management generally. They proved themselves to be hard-working, dedicated individuals who took their representative responsibilities seriously, agreeing to meet in regular public sessions once each month in Spring Creek and more frequently in special sessions in other towns throughout the district in order to allow maximum opportunity for all patrons to attend. In an attempt to achieve consensus, they began from the start to devote long hours to their work on the board and to thoroughly discuss and agree on major policy issues before making final decisions. But despite the history of local independence and individualism in this region, no salient factionalism and little politicking developed.

The school board in 1972 and thereafter closely approximated a "status congruent school board," defined as one in which "discussion...is of utmost importance [and] board members are equal in status and treat each other as colleagues free to act as individuals" (McCarty and Ramsey 1971: 19). They considered themselves as peers, and several of them openly

stated that equally they represented all segments and constituencies of the community.

Since 1972, the overwhelming majority of school trustees in River District have been male ranchers; only one woman and just a few non-ranchers have ever been elected to the board. Perhaps most significantly, despite their majority population in the district, no miners have ever been elected, although several from the northern sector have been on the ballot from time to time.

The miners' inability to win election to the school board can be understood by comparing the social order of the mining industry to that of ranching. Miners tend to associate most frequently within such restrictive vertical hierarchies of the mining companies as unions and company town governments, outside of which they are greeted as relative strangers. Furthermore, local mining industry leaders, from among whom one would expect to find candidates to public office, tend to operate according to principles ill-suited to the sort of long-term involvement in local affairs expected of a school board candidate or member. As Rex Lucas had noted in his 1971 study of single-industry towns,

> The upper echelons [of local industry] are part of an international, national, or company-wide system, rather than a local or community-bound system. The local manager or superintendent has been moved from another division or plant, and expects to be moved again. He, his wife, and his family are strangers in town; their loyalties are not bound up in local community affairs, but in the company as a whole, and particularly on the next move...; these people are not part of the community, and they know it, and so do the inhabitants. (1971: 153-154)

On the other hand, the kind of horizontal networks in which ranchers affiliate, through their various cattlemen's and wool growers' associations and agro-business bureaus and agencies (like the Farm Bureau and the Soil Conservation Service), have given them the opportunity to

become well-known around the school district and county, as well as throughout the state and region. Many ranchers involve themselves and their families in a wide range of community activities and integrative ceremonials. They travel widely, locally and away from home, attending fairs, livestock shows, and auctions where they meet and continually reacquaint themselves with colleagues, neighbors, and friends who will remember them when the need for their support arises. Hence, ranchers easily win school trustee elections when running against miners, and the ranching ethos and social outlook above all others tends to dominate the operational orientation of the school board.

School Administrators

One of the first decisions made by the new school board in January 1972 was to establish a district central office in Spring Creek, not insignificantly the commercial center of the rancher-dominated southern part of the school district. It was also decided that for purposes of transitional stability no schools would be closed and no bus routes changed. Rather, the unification was strictly administrative, involving the creation of a new management structure that necessitated the redefinition of some roles and the modification or elimination of others. The board then appointed two superintendents, four administrative principals (one for each of the four largest attendance areas: Wister-Rim, Union, Spring Creek, and Copperton), and a head teacher for tiny Marathon.[14] From the beginning, the school board exercised considerable power in policy decisions, but the tone for much of the school district's daily operation was set by the administrators who were appointed by the trustees and who represented most of the wishes and values of the board as a group.

The superintendents of the formerly autonomous Spring Creek and Union school districts were appointed as the unified district's first superintendent and assistant superintendent, respectively.[15] They immediately occupied the top of the administrative hierarchy, directly below the board of trustees.

The head superintendent became the direct and primary formal link between the school board on the one hand and the outlying administrative area principals, head teachers, and subordinate staff members on the other. His duties included serving as chief executive officer; advisor and counselor to the trustees; fiscal officer; and general overseer of staff, classroom operations, interactions between school personnel and patrons, and school plant maintenance.

The assistant superintendent was directly responsible to the head superintendent and through him to the school board. Together the two superintendents represented the local school district to outside persons and agencies, such as the local county authorities and agencies, to nearby universities and colleges of education, and to state and federal officials, including the staff of the ES program in Washington, D.C.

The assistant superintendent was given considerable latitude for providing input into decision making and in the supervision of district operations; his position was designed more as a co-superintendent than as a subordinate one. His primary responsibilities lay in the areas of personnel and curriculum, but they also included the direct supervision of all state and federal programs in which the district might be involved. The district's Policies and Procedures Handbook (completed in 1973) states, for example, that the assistant superintendent is to supervise "all federal programs with district-wide impact;" hence, primary responsibility for the ES project was his.

The first assistant superintendent was appointed early in 1972 to supervise the application to the ES program and to direct ES planning until he resigned (for personal reasons) in January 1973 (see Chapter Three).

Immediately below the two superintendents in the organizational pyramid were the four administrative area principals who replaced the independent superintendents of the former school districts. They and the head teacher at Marathon were assigned to supervise the instructional programs, plant operations and maintenance, pupil transportation, hot lunch programs, local school budgets, local employees, and record keeping of all the schools in their respective administrative jurisdictions. In addition, each administrative principal was appointed principal of the elementary school in his area, while the administrator at Copperton was appointed high school principal as well. Three high school principals were then appointed, immediately subordinate to the administrative principals, at Union, Wister, and Spring Creek. Each position was defined as full-time administrative with no teaching duties (see Figure 2).[16]

Teachers and other certified personnel such as librarians, guidance counselors, and speech pathologists (and, after 1974, a district psychometrician) completed the organizational scheme. Three classroom teachers were appointed as head teachers to assist the administrative principals in the outlying schools at Cow Creek and Rim, and at Copperton.

At the beginning of the 1975-1976 school year, well into the implementation of the ES project and over three years after reorganization, there were 125 teachers and other nonadministrative certified personnel, plus nine administrators, for a total of 132 certified personnel district-wide. The number of teachers at any one school facility ranged from one at the remote Beer Mug ranch school to 21 (not including the principal) at the Spring

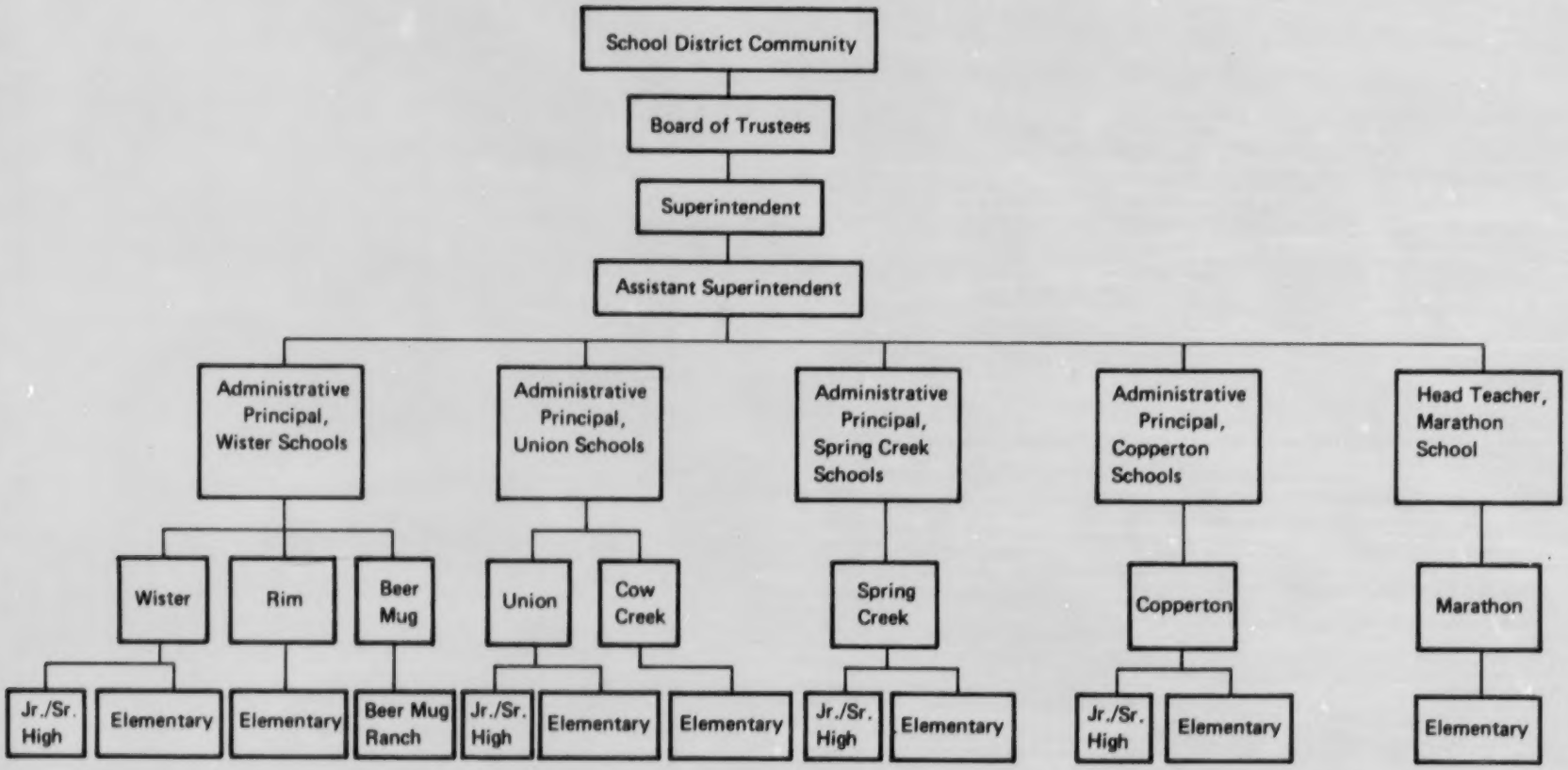

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Figure 2. Organizational Chart of River District

Creek junior-senior high school. The district's overall student enrollment for that same year was 1,482 in grades kindergarten through twelve.[17]

All of the chief administrators of the school district--the two superintendents and the administrative area principals--comprised an administrative council which met frequently at two-week intervals during the academic year. Meetings were deliberately rotated from school to school to alleviate feelings of isolation and to facilitate opportunities for more direct communication between the administration and their subordinates. Quite frequently, in fact almost regularly, administrative council meetings were also attended by the Marathon head teacher, the ES project director, the director of the Instructional Media Center, and the high school principal and head teacher of the host area school. And regularly for the first year and one-half of my research, I attended as an observer.

The administrative council was designed as a forum at which district-wide concerns could be aired. Council members interacted quite closely with one another, and indirectly with their teaching staffs and the trustees, reflecting the operational scheme of the district. On the one hand, the council regularly planned and coordinated inter-school activities and served as a link between the central office and the individual schools. On the other hand, it served as an advisory panel to the school board. Policy and procedures were regularly discussed, and proposals were framed by council members for consideration by the trustees. In the public forum of school board meetings, the superintendent and his assistant reflected the will of the council as a group and acted as intermediaries between the council and the school board members.

Like the school board, the council held frequent meetings. The administrators worked long hours together and discussed matters at length

in an attempt to reach consensus as well as to maintain a facade of unity. Council members felt that they were duty-bound to set an example of unity, to strive to avoid open conflict and to minimize potential problems among themselves and among their schools which historically had been rivals.

Unity on the administrative council, however, was more difficult to attain than to talk about, particularly given an atmosphere of professional and interpersonal rivalry triggered by the subordination of the formerly autonomous superintnedents to the positions of "administrative principals" under the new system. A certain ambiguity of roles and statuses (and a concomitant scrambling for control of the shifting power and prestige structure in the new district) was experienced by some council members, and arguments periodically disrupted council sessions for as long as I was able to observe them openly and, reportedly, long after the meetings were closed to outside observers in 1974. Nonetheless, the public image of corporate unity of purpose and action by educators who appeared to work well together was maintained. Disctinctions between private and public behavior of this sort is the central theme of Erving Goffman's (1959) well-known work, The Presentation of Self in Everday Life. Therein, Goffman refers to the difference in terms of a theoretical model. The closed council meetings in this instance correspond to what Goffman calls the "back stage region," while the public display of unity and goodwill is played out on the "front stage region" of behavior. The council's public image was fostered, in great part, by the use of humor and informality in group deliberations and by skillful employment of time and indirection by the superintendent as the council chairman (Messerschmidt 1975; cf. Douglas 1968).

One area of particular concern and tension in council affairs was, predictably, the amount of autonomy and local (versus central) control

which each administrative principal had in directing ES project affairs in his schools. Control over such activities as the organization and implementation of teacher workshops, for instance, became an issue among administrative principals in 1973 and early 1974. It was the direct result of a clash of personalities and styles of operation and caused the firing of the first local project director early in 1974 and his replacement with a better-liked, less aggressive, individual. Control over the independent school budgets for ES was another issue which arose between the administrative principals and the superintendents in 1974 and 1975. It was ultimately resolved by decentralizing the project, stripping the second project director of all remaining authority, and thereby undermining the salient local goal of unity and the general ES program objective of comprehensiveness. (Each of these issues is discussed in the following chapter.)

Each time a federal official visited River District during the course of the project, all the members of the administrative council, along with the ES director and his staff, were directly involved in discussions and negotiations. The front line, or the principally responsible agents of contact, however, were the two local superintendents on the one hand and the Washington-based project officers on the other.

ES PROJECT OFFICERS AT WORK: CONTEXT AND CONFUSION

The National Institute of Education (NIE) is a federal bureaucracy of which ES was a component part. In their dealings with River District both operated on the basis of standards and norms typically attributed to bureaucratic organizations. Federal officials, including the field staff of ES "project officers" interpret their duties, design their strategies for action, and function in roles and styles reflective of the needs and priorities of the federal bureaucracy. The premises of bureaucratic

organizations are often thought to be logical, rational, goal-oriented, and possessing a fairly clear and well-defined science of application or technology (March and Simon 1958).

In contrast to this "rational model" of public agencies, at least one group of analysts has recently described NIE instead as an "organized anarchy" (Sproull, Weiner and Wolf 1978).[18] In their dispassionate and perceptive biography of the birth and growing pains of NIE in the early 1970s, NIE appears to exhibit the epitomy of non-rational behavior.[19] By their definition, organized anarchies are typically characterized by "ambiguous goals, unclear technology, and fluid participation...[where] if goals are measurable, they are not widely agreed to; if they are acceptable to all parties, they are neither measurable nor operational" (1978:5). An "unclear technology" is one "in which there is only a low probability of identifying or developing courses of action that have an intended impact upon a previously specified problem" (1978:5).

My research in River District tends to support the anarchy model for both NIE and ES as a part of it. Fuzziness of goals, confusion of intent, and controversy in action were some of the characteristics of the Institute, as manifested in the ES program and in the behavior of the ES project officers and others in Washington, D.C., in their relations with River District personnel. For example, I was told by district officials that ES staff seemed unable to monitor the project with a coherent or consistent policy, or from a position of strength. And, on more than one occasion I heard ES project officers describe NIE as "chaotic." In researching personnel morale within NIE, Sproull, Weiner and Wolf report similar comments ranging from staff complaints of being "overworked," "underworked," and "confused," to feelings of "a sense of drift within the Institute" (1978: 210-212). Nonetheless, the federal officials who

represented NIE and ES to River District persisted in playing the "front stage," where roles of calm and purposeful rationality were played out, while the "back stage" reality of internal disharmony and anarchy were effectively "masked" (cf. Berreman 1962, Serber n.d.).

An understanding of how ES was seen to operate in River District necessarily demands some understanding of the environmental context of ES within its parent agency, NIE. ES (through its officers in Washington, D.C.) may have appeared to act "in sometimes arbitrary, inconsistent, or even random ways, but its actions were often due to its relationship to the federal bureaucracy of which it was a part" (Herriott 1979: 64).

The National Institute of Education

NIE was a natural experiment in organizational development, designed around certain assumptions about the national need for improved educational research and development (R&D). ES, as an integral part of it, was seen by some of its early advocates as a "prototype of the research initiative which NIE would carry on" (Herriott 1979: 51). Conceived in 1969, and born in late 1970 within the U.S. Office of Education, ES was promoted by President Nixon as a strategy for building "a bridge between educational research and actual practice" (quoted in Herriott 1979: 51). As Herriott describes Experimental Schools:

> It was to represent a new approach for federal change efforts, involving local school districts and the federal government as "partners" in a cooperative effort of "field experiments" in comprehensive educational change. (Herriott 1979: 51; emphasis in the original)

ES was transferred from the Office of Education (OE) to the new NIE in August 1972, shortly after the legislation creating NIE was signed by President Nixon. ES's new host organization was from the beginning a confusing place to be, suffering through a variety of complex problems with

personnel, programs, financing, and organizational goals and structures. These were especially trying times for NIE (as well as for the entire nation, in the midst of the Watergate scandal). The Institute was growing rapidly in scope, seeking rationality and purpose, submitting to severe scrutiny and criticism from within, and pressured by political factors.[20]

Within the Institute, ES staff members quickly became aware that the climate of support for their program was not good. As Herriott has reported, the leaders of NIE were highly skeptical of this and other such "inherited programs." They wanted to develop their own forms of educational research and not be held accountable for the results of the programs like ES which had originated elsewhere. They saw the costs of continuing ES in NIE as a "major threat" to their own ability to locate financing for their own new initiatives; and they saw ES bringing with it an assertive program director and project officers "committed primarily to the facilitation of practice, rather than to research on practice" which NIE's leaders sought. In short, the basic assumptions of the ES program regarding educational change were repeatedly attacked within its new host agency (Herriott 1979: 66).

The environment of NIE, the host agency for the life of ES after August 1972, is well described in Sproull, Weiner and Wolf (1978). They discuss and analyze what they call the "belief structure" of NIE, which I perceive to be analogous to the value structure or value orientation in the life of River District citizens and educators. Just as values in a local culture like River District's serve as the premises for daily behavior and action, so does the belief structure of a federal agency like NIE serve as a guide to decision-making behavior and action within its much more narrowly defined "culture."

A basic part of the NIE (and ES) "way of life" has been discussed in terms of certain "axioms" in the literature. Sproull, Weiner and Wolf identify an "axiom of progress" and an "axiom of management" (1978: 202ff).

The "axiom of progress" has two forms, one in the general environment around the agency and the other within the agency itself. There was in the agency's evaluative environment "a firm belief that R&D should yield tangible 'improvements' in schooling within a few years" and that "education R&D should be able to develop a strong constituency among school practitioners" (1978: 203). But the authors conclude that the quest for strong practitioner support was never satisfied. Part of the reason lies in the negative impression of NIE held by many people outside of the agency, a perspective that was certainly held by practitioners in River School District.[21]

According to the "axiom of management" there was "a persistent belief that the R&D process [could and should] be managed from the federal level." Sproull, Weiner and Wolf report further that:

> federal officials have spoken and acted as if they were able to prespecify the directions and objectives that individual research and development projects should pursue and achieve. And, even beyond that, they have often adopted the posture that individual projects should be orchestrated in a way constituting a coherent, comprehensive agencywide attack on selected problems in American education. (1978: 202)

ES, by design, was a step away from such highly directed R&D management procedures. But, if this attitude prevailed within NIE, one wonders how well the ES program--with its specific goal of local design and direction of projects--fit in and was encouraged. Not well, according to the available evidence.[22]

During the height of the turmoil in 1974 about the goals and management structure of NIE and its component parts, the agency commissioned

a special review of the ES program. A major issue in the review panel's report (called the "Doyle Report" after its principal author) was whether or not the ES program should remain intact within NIE or have its various parts dispersed into other units of the Institute (Doyle 1975). ES staff favored continued autonomy as a single program, but a less than satisfactory compromise was eventually worked out, and ES became a subordinate component within one of its previously co-equal NIE programs (Herriott 1979: 70).

In the larger context of NIE, ES was one of the pawns of a reorganization effort which had been going on since its inception as an R&D Institute. In a period of 29 months, from June 1972 to November 1974, NIE underwent four reorganizations. In the last of these, the original purpose of NIE and of ES as its research prototype seems to have been forgotten. As Sproull, Weiner and Wolf have discouragingly concluded:

> By the fall of 1974, the reorganizations had created unintended effects. Instead of reassuring outside observers, the repeated reorganizations created the impression of instability and a lack of direction. Take, for example, the last reorganization: it was in this announcement (November 1974) that the NIE, mandated to carry out research in education, eliminated its Office of Research. (1978: 161; emphasis added)

NIE's internal problems could not help but be reflected in the actions and behavior of ES program and project staff vis-a-vis the various rural districts of the experiment. It is with this context in mind, the confused "culture" (if you will) of ES within NIE, that we turn now to a description of ES officials based in Washington, D.C.

The federal officials most closely observed during the research include three of the four project officers assigned to River District between 1972 and 1976. I also encountered and recorded observations of, and heard and read various accounts describing, the first and second ES

Program Directors, a fiscal officer, and several other ES staff and consultants, all of whom visited the site on infrequent occasions. It was primarily the ES project officers, however, who had the most impact on local attempts at planning, implementing, and evaluating the project and about whom the locals seemed to be most aware and have the most opinions, both critical and supportive.

The ES Project Officers

It was primarily through the ES project officers that the locals (and I) saw firsthand how the ES and NIE bureaucracies functioned.[23] And, however distorted and shortsighted the local viewpoint may have been, it was through the activities (and at times the apparent inactivity) of the project officers in particular that local perspectives about the "feds" were developed, and on which many local actions and reactions (and considerable inaction) were predicated.[24]

The administrative hierarchy of ES consisted, in part, of a Program Director and a team of subordinate project officers, all directly involved with the various Experimental School projects in eight urban and ten rural school districts. ES program staff people were the primary ties between River District and NIE. Among them, the project officers served as the "communication links and mediators between the norms of the federal bureaucracy and the values of the community and institutions with which they work" (Corwin 1977: 1). Project officers are more clearly defined as "federal administrators in direct contact with state and local governements, school districts, and other recipient institutions;" their responsibilities put them in a position to exercise "a vital influence on the nature and quality of relationships that federal agencies establish with other

levels of government" such as local educational agencies like River District (Corwin 1977: 1).

Corwin reports--not surprisingly--that confusion about the essential nature of ES and of the rules, responsibilities, and styles of its agents clouded the minds of all the ES project officers. They wondered if ES was primarily a research project, a grant-in-aid, or a demonstration. Some became actively involved in the local projects, giving both advice and technical assistance. But the overall confusion "eventually had a paralyzing effect" on them. Whereas, on the one hand, they "had visible impacts on the projects..., on the other hand [they] were never sure whether it was appropriate for them to provide technical assistance" or to serve merely as monitors or proctors of the locally directed efforts. In time, three distinct project officer roles emerged, which Corwin categorizes as (1) the contract manager, (2) the project advisor, and (3) the technical assistance specialist (Corwin 1977: 9, 10, 13).

All three role types could be observed in River District. All project officers fulfilled the role of contract manager, monitoring and maintaining general surveillance over the project as well as enforcing the contract provisions. The managerial role was the primary role of project officers as first envisioned by those who designed the ES program. As Corwin puts it, contract management was the role that project officers found they "must fill" (1977: 13).

The second project officer in River District most clearly also played the role of project adviser, the second of Corwin's categories (1977: 18-21). Her advice about a central theme near the beginning of her tenure in December 1972 and, later, her criticisms of the plan during the summer of 1973, shortly before she was replaced, are well-remembered

in River District and were generally distasteful to local officials. Her main concern was over the design of the local project. The closest she ever got to the mechanics of implementation was following completion of planning by the educators and citizens of River District, during the summer of 1973, especially during and after the fateful contract negotiations in Washington, D.C., in May 1973 (described in the next chapter).

Technical specialists, Corwin's third category, were, on the contrary, most concerned with actual implementation, including evaluation (see Chapters Five and Six). The third and fourth project officers who began monitoring the River District project in the fall and winter of 1973-1974, respectively, most clearly fit the description of technical specialists, especially the latter officer who served the longest of any of them. In September 1973 the third officer, for example, was keen on assisting local officials to come up with a strategy for beginning implementation immediately, despite some serious delays and setbacks resulting from problems which arose during the preceeding summer. Both of these project officers perceived that the design of the project, however good or bad it might be, was essentially a fait accompli. There was little they could do now but assist the district personnel with its implementation. As the fourth project officer put it, employing a local metaphor during his first or second visit to the site, "there is little we can do here now but go with their horses!"

Besides their help with project implementation, these two project officers fulfilled two other responsibilities which seemed to come with their active technical assistance roles: brokering for technical advice, and acting as advocates (Corwin 1977: 21-23). As a broker, for instance, the fourth officer acted as a go-between to suggest whom River District

officials might hire to assist them with local project evaluation. He also volunteered a special pupil evaluation package which he had developed for use in another school district. As an advocate, he frequently represented the local project's interests to the federal agency, intervening in disputes about how certain budget categories should be handled and about the purchase of certain questionable supplies and equipment, such as the hardware (video equipment, etc.) necessary to meet the district's goal of recycling career education programs that had been originated by the ETD educational satellite project.

CONCLUSIONS

Change was the single most dominant theme of the Experimental Schools program, and various, sometimes conflicting, interpretations of change influenced the actions in River District of both the locals and the feds. In examining the theme of change, it is helpful to examine the behavior of the various advocates of change more closely.

All of the project officers, and most everyone else involved in this project, federally and locally, were change advocates. What was striking was their different styles, and the different reactions to those styles in River District. A successful style of change advocacy is one which is cognizant of the strong local cultural values as well as of federal "belief structures" and other premises for decision making and behavior. It should not only recognize and be sensitive to the contingencies and constraints of both the federal and local contexts, but should be able and free to work effectively to ameliorate the obvious differences between them, in order to get on with the business of improving American education. Ideally, this sort of progressive yet sensitive style of change should predate even the first efforts at planning for change. It did to

some degree in ES, but it seems to have been set aside and lost in the confusion in which ES found itself within the NIE bureaucracy during 1972 and 1973.

It took some time for any sort of sensitive and progressive change advocacy on the part of project officers to reemerge in River District, following a difficult start. When it did appear, as described below, it was too late, too little, and a little too unique in the larger context of ES and NIE to effect any long-range improvement.

Early in the ES planning, before the emergence of serious problems and conflict, the ES program director in Washington, D.C., had said that he was "anxious to create a viable partnership" with River District, with NIE providing monetary incentives and River District providing local initiatives. Very quickly during the planning year and in the months following submission of the final plan (as will be seen in Chapter Five), the NIE side of that partnership evolved into one of insensitivity, aggressive change advocacy, with the initiatives for action being preempted by federal personnel.

The project monitoring styles and change-promoting initiatives of the federal project officers between 1972 and 1976 can be categorized in two types, one which may be called "utopic" and another which is more "pragmatic" (Gallaher 1973). According to Gallaher, utopic advocates do things <u>to</u> and plan <u>for</u> their target populations, in effect imposing change from above and outside, rather than working with and from within. This type of advocacy dominated Washington's role during the planning phase and well into the summer and early fall of 1973. According to Gallaher's alternative model, the pragmatic advocate is, on the other hand, concerned mainly with creating a climate conducive to acceptance through an understanding of the local system, parts of which he wishes to change.[25]

The mandate of its original planners that Experimental Schools develop new relationships and promote educational innovation according to local needs and ideas constituted an important departure from previous federal aid to education programs. But it appears that this facilitating mandate was forgotten. There may be many reasons for this reversal: the problems and confusion within the new agency, misunderstandings of the mandate by Congress, or the Nixon administration's general neglect of domestic affairs. For whatever reason, federal ES staff took on an increasingly utopic advocacy role during 1972 and 1973 in River District. In their efforts "to do things to and plan for" River District, their actions alienated the very people they were attempting to help and were inimical to the "less directive, more personal and supportive style" which they had originally set out to effect (Corwin 1977: 7).

It is not surprising that Washington bureaucrats would be perhaps unaware of, or at least insensitive to, local values. They came into the school district at an initial disadvantage in that they were federal bureaucrats, outsiders. Some of them had little prior experience with schools or rural communities. They came with a definite mission in mind, prodded by their own personal need and the agency's need to demonstrate accountability to higher authority in Washington, to the ES and NIE directors and ultimately to the Congress itself. Their lack of awareness of some of the nuances of the local culture, and their apparent insensitivity to some aspects of local perspective, could have been overcome. But for the most part, ES staff during the planning year belied their own stated philosophy of local project autonomy and violated local value orientations. Moreover, their operational procedures did not reflect a desire for a "viable partnership based on mutual respect and trust" which their director had said they were attempting to establish. As a result, the

federal-local relationship went sour. Utopic advocacy appeared to be ineffectual in creating the sort of good rapport and close working relationship between the locals and the feds on which creative and lasting change depended.

A change in advocacy style also came with each change in federal project officer. As we shall see in Chapter Five, a new officer, the third, came to the site in September 1973 at the height of hostilities and concerned herself with "creating a climate conducive to acceptance." She represented herself as breaking from the immediate past, and expressed her determination to reinstate some of the original intent of the ES program. Reflecting on the project later in a personal interview with me, she noted, for example, that advocating change from outside was at the root of the troubles. "Imposing the other [federal] order," she said, "is where the whole problem lies."

This project officer displayed an educational professionalism and a knowledge of the local project and of rural problems and conditions which won her the respect of all. She knew how to use local symbols and to minimize her liability as an outsider (and as a female in a male-dominated setting). She appealed to local values of fair play and personal integrity, and through her understanding of both the local and federal systems, she went a long way toward restoring federal-local rapport and a qualified trust. Not the least of her good marks, from the local view, was for her adept way of offering assistance over several hurdles (both operational and financial) which were blocking the district's attempts at project implementation. She was the first of the technical assistance-oriented project officers.

Her tenure as project officer was short; she was soon replaced by a fourth project officer who shared her sensitivities and maintained the

same pragmatic stance and the same role as technical assistant to the site. He stayed for nearly two years, giving continuity to the new and better relations developing between Washington, D.C., and the school district.

The fourth federal officer was just as effective as the third in using the local value system, thereby continuing the process of accommodation. Unlike his predecessors, he was a Westerner, which in this western rural school district was surely in his favor. He was also an experienced educator and had worked as a local official on a similar educational project elsewhere. Hence, his credentials were in order, and his experience was appropriate. This made credible his overt attempts to disassociate himself from the Washington bureaucracy which, he said, "confounds rather than complements." He was a gifted raconteur, and his stories emphasized an appreciation for local autonomy and hard work. In his dealings at an official level he played an active but unabrasive role. He provided considerable technical assistance and advice, but did so within the pragmatic advocate model. He attempted to adjust federal demands to local contingencies, a kind of "creative federalism" previously unfamiliar to River District.

This fourth project officer even spoke like a pragmatic advocate. "I want to help," he said to district personnel in 1974. "I want to know River District's hopes and plans and how [you] do it... It's your program..., not mine."[26]

Sometime later he reiterated his support of localism and in so doing brought the project back to the original intent of Experimental Schools. "This is River District," he said in the opening remarks to an evaluation workshop: "<u>your</u> program, <u>your</u> children... A program that isn't rooted in the people who operate it is doomed to failure."

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLEMENTATION CONFUSION

The implementation of River District's Experimental Schools project was scheduled to begin in its schools and classrooms in the fall of 1973. Achievement of that goal, however, was thwarted by several disruptive events and misunderstandings, and by confusion in the contract negotiations at the end of May, 1973. Some of the confusion can be traced to the pre-negotiation activities in April after the final plan had been submitted but before it was formally accepted by NIE. Various mis-communications and mis-understandings between ES program staff and River District staff, that is between the "feds" at the center and the "locals" in the hinterlands, can ultimately be traced to the problems of project planning during the previous winter. There were misunderstandings in River District about the meaning of ES, and by both parties about each other's cultural values and decision-making premises. The problem of "feds" and "locals" coming essentially from "different cultures" to try to work together to effect innovation and change in a traditionally conservative rural school district was compounded by the very real cultural and physical distances between them.

Because much of the energy expended in developing and implementing the ES project in River District was concentrated at the administrative level, most of the following account focuses on that level; little mention is made of ES in the schools or classrooms, reflecting the relative inaction and inattention of project staff to its implementation at those levels.

NEGOTIATION AND CONFLICT,
APRIL-SEPTEMBER 1973

In early April 1973 the federal project officer called from Washington, D.C. to say that a team of consultants to the federal ES program would be arriving in Spring Creek the following morning at 8:30 to conduct a final on-site evaluation of the proposed project. She asked that meetings with a wide range of district personnel be scheduled for them. Local administrators were astonished at the timing of her request, but they did their best to comply. The consultants met with the few administrators, teachers, and trustees who could be contacted and assembled on such short notice in the large school district.

The consultants' verbal evaluation was complimentary of the district and its 78-page educational plan. They indicated that the district would hear within the week of final approval for the project. A few days later, the director of the ES program in Washington wrote to announce the award of full five-year funding and to congratulate the district on a fine job of planning. He mentioned that the budget might be "scaled down" a bit, and in a subsequent phone call he reportedly mentioned a budget reduction figure of 4 percent. Negotiations now appeared to be perfunctory; steps toward full implementation of the project could begin.

In May, the superintendent, the temporary planning director, and the incoming new assistant superintendent (who would formally join the district on July 1), flew to Washington to formally negotiate the ES contract. Because of the understanding they had from the program director, they were quite unprepared for what happened. NIE officials informed them that they were being offered a contract for $361,351 for three years instead of the expected $596,000 for five years, and that funding for the

two final years would be contingent upon subsequent negotiations to be held in 1976. Furthermore, they were told that their plan was inadequate and that major portions of it required extensive rewriting. Funding would follow, provided that certain changes in the plan could be accomplished quickly and satisfactorily.

River District administrators and planners had apparently misunderstood federal negotiation and funding procedures and had not been sufficiently informed by the federal project officer about what to expect, for they were genuinely surprised and perplexed by the turn of events. What was apparently standard procedure in Washington--negotiating a contract in two parts, 60% funding for the first three years and the remaining 40% later--was interpreted by the River District personnel as an unwarranted "cut" of 40% overall. The low level of trust toward Washington officials at the time--both nationally as a result of public disclosure of Watergate events, and locally as a result of misunderstandings about the project contract--contributed to the suspicion that this two-stage funding arrangement meant that Experimental Schools officials were backing away from earlier verbal assurances to the district.

The River District personnel returned home with none of the euphoria with which they had earlier begun the planning year. The so-called "honeymoon" phase of federal-local relations was definitely over. Back in the district, they expressed to their constituents a belief that they had been misled, that their budget had been arbitrarily cut, that criticism of the plan was unnecessarily severe, and that directives on how to improve and rewrite the plan were vague. The tone of the Washington meeting and the assertiveness and abrasiveness of ES staff members bothered them. As local personnel described it, the meeting was dominated by

eastern bureaucrats and they themselves, the rural administrators who were ultimately responsible for the plan, had had little say in the final decisions. And although they were told that two more years' (and the remaining 40%) funding would be considered in 1976, they remained apprehensive and cynical about any further "negotiations with Washington." The traditional suspicions about government bureaucrats and bureaucracies "back East" were reemerging in River District; at this point the locals felt they had been "rooked by the feds."[1]

Several weeks went by before they heard more concretely what was expected by NIE in the way of revising the River District plan. Then, early in July, in an undated memo entitled "Scope of Work," the federal project officer addressed the issue and identified two major problems. Primarily, she was still concerned about the "central theme", and unsatisfied with the previous compromise theme, she suggested an entirely new one. Secondly, she attached a long list of "special conditions" to the five components of the ES plan to which the district was expected to respond immediately with specific changes and improvements, as a precondition to further funding for implementation.

Although NIE apparently recognized a need for unity and coordination of district affairs, its imposition of a new central theme indicated once again either a lack of understanding and appreciation (or a deliberate ignorance) of the serious concern in River District for "local control." In the long run, the new theme was ignored. It never became a fixed part of the project, but its content is, nonetheless, interesting to note. The thrust of this new theme represents a project officer's previously suggested theme of individualized instruction:

> The Project in River District will include the entire school district in a systematic process of change designed to result in the delivery of educational services which will prepare students for productive work and enjoyable leisure in accord with their individual needs and interests. All aspects of the educational system will be co-ordinated in such a way as to support the integration of themes and skills of career education and cultural education with on-going curricular efforts. Community participation will be encouraged throughout all phases of the educational process.

The conditions stated in her memo as needing immediate attention were taken more seriously. River District officials were instructed to revise and submit new plans as follows:

1. a plan for organization and administration of the project to include the decision-making process at each level and role descriptions of the staff positions involved...

2. a plan for curriculum co-ordination/development/articulation/integration indicating the process used to determine priorities and specific activities designed to achieve objectives...

3. a plan for utilizing counselor services...

4. the revised budget (negotiated on the previous May 30th)...

5. objectives for the community school program...

6. further details for implementation of curriculum coordination, et cetera, including the process for determining priorities...

7. objectives and plans for career education...

8. objectives and plans for cultural education...

9. plans for using video-taping equipment and supplies in the media center, including plans for co-ordinating existing staff and supplies and the training and support of staff...

10. plans for staff summer training workshops...

11. plans for staff training workshops during the school year, 1973-1974...

12. plans for staff training workshops in succeeding summers... (emphasis added)

These conditions astounded the superintendent and his staff. To them the summer workshops (item 10), for instance, needed immediate approval and funding, not further planning. Certain specialists and consultants who had been contacted months before needed confirmation of their roles in the workshops. Having spent an entire year writing the plans, the locals asked themselves: Were they now, in only a month's time, really expected to complete all these changes as well?, and so suddenly? Nonetheless they tried to do so.

The new assistant superintendent and the temporary project planning director spent an entire weekend reworking specific parts of the plan in an attempt to comply. But when they presented their revisions to the federal project officer, she argued that no one could possibly do an adequate job that quickly. With that, local disillusionment and discouragement in local-federal relations plummeted to a new low. Now some hard decisions had to be made about school and project priorities.

Already enmeshed in other local responsibilities, the school administrators were faced with the difficult problem of how to allocate their limited time and energies. They faced at least six other agendas: (1) a deadline for the district's official budget, required by state law; (2) lengthy planning and negotiations with school architects following the successful passage of a large building bond election in June; (3) acquainting the new assistant superintendent with district affairs; (4) acquainting the newly hired coordinators of the career and community education components of the ES project with district affairs; (5) attending to the problem of overcrowding in the schools at Wister and Union, and

(6) completing a comprehensive school district policy and procedures handbook as required by the board of trustees. It was also in July that I, the outside researcher, arrived in the school district to document all these affairs, adding a whole new dimension to local and ES activities and responsibilities. In short, there seemed to be little chance for the administrators to work effectively or for any length of time to make the necessary changes in the ES project plan with all these other contingencies and deadlines competing for their attentions and energies.

Like all school districts large and small, River District had a dynamic all its own. In addition, it had its internal problems of unification and rapid population growth to contend with. As a result, participation in the Experimental Schools program--once viewed as a potential help in solving some of these problems--was beginning to be viewed as a burdensome extra and a hindrance to their solution.

Could some of the local administrative work have been delegated to junior persons in the district, to tenured teachers or local principals? These were not workable options, for even if a precedent for delegating authority to subordinates in the district had been developed, most of the staff had already left for their summer vacations or summer school, or were engaged in full-time seasonal work to supplement their teaching salaries. Those who remained were dispersed throughout the expansive district and could not be expected to absorb the time and expense necessary to work in Spring Creek where the help was most needed. And, if the top administrators hired people already residing in Spring Creek they ran the risk of being accused of "showing favoritism".

The recently recruited assistant superintendent, whose formal responsibilities included all relations with outside education agencies

(such as NIE and the state education offices in Cheyenne) could certainly not be expected to solve the ES project crisis himself--he was not only too new to the district, but he was barely acquainted with the project and had no first-hand knowledge of previous planning. Besides, he was valiantly trying to catch up on many matters that had been unresolved since the first assistant superintendent unexpectedly resigned.

A partial solution was attempted by appointing the newly arrived coordinator for career education to the position of local ES project director. But as he had very little administrative experience and was not expected to make major policy or management decisions, his assistance in the ES crisis took very little pressure off of the superintendents. There was, simply, no satisfactory solution. The newly unified district still required great attention; local growth pains and unification traumas were still taking most of the time and energies of the top administrators. Consequently, ES took a back seat.

Although some of the revision and replanning expectations were ignored that summer, other aspects of the ES project received considerable attention. Among them were plans for the summer workshops; they had to be agreed upon and funded by NIE immediately if implementation was going to be effective and begin on schedule in September. Two staff workshops had been outlined in the plan, one in cultural education and the other, the more important one, in career education. They were to involve many teachers and administrators and were designed to formally acquaint them with the goals of the ES project and its classroom activities. Several consultants from outside the district had committed time and expertise to the district for several weeks in August. And it was expected that much of the curriculum planning, generally ignored in the formal project

plan, would take place during these workshops. It was hoped that the workshops would give the ES project in River District its necessary "kickoff." However, the ES project officer expressed serious reservations about the wisdom of proceeding with all of this. Without the expected planning revisions, she first refused to fund either workshop, but later reconsidered and funded the cultural workshop (subsequently held at the University of Wyoming in August).

Career education was considered by many to be at the very heart of the local ES project. When told by district administrators that failure to hold the career education workshop in particular would likely weaken the project's entire implementation effort, the federal project officer suggested replanning and rescheduling it later, after school had begun. The superintendents declared that to be infeasible. A successful workshop would require many days and the involvement of a majority of the district's teachers. To accomplish this all schools would have to be closed. Therefore, he directed that the career workshop be postponed until the following summer.

During August, another issue surfaced--local administration of the project. It was the district's intent, as stated in the project plan, to employ a full-time ES project director who would be subordinate to the assistant superintendent. Under the planned facet of organization and administration, the plan stated that the director "will report directly to the Assistant Superintendent and will work cooperatively with the administrative principals." More specifically, the director's tasks were to include general administrative supervision of project budgeting and reporting, the establishment of cooperation among staff, the planning of in-service training and workshops, and the sustaining of community involvement.

After three years, the duties of the director were to be incorporated fully into those of the assistant superintendent.

The intent of the administrative arrangement was to give the assistant superintendent ultimate authority over the project while leaving him virtually free from involvement in project activities so that he could devote his full attention to other district-wide issues. Much to the astonishment and anger of local administrators and trustees, the federal project officer rejected this proposed arrangement on the grounds that, given the district's need for unity, project leadership could not be separated from the primary leadership of the district as a whole.

River District officials balked, both because they did not share the federal officials' perceptions of ES as the major integrating force in the school district and, predictably, because they viewed the response as yet another example of federal attempts to control the project. Compliance with the Washington staff's suggested modifications appeared to be contrary to established district policy and lines of authority.

Determined to do what "we want to do, not what someone else thinks we should do" (as the superintendent had phrased it a year earlier), school officials went ahead and formally appointed the new career education coordinator as the project's director anyway. The community education coordinator would work directly with him. Without the kickoff career education workshop, the superintendents felt strongly that such a local ES project director was all the more necessary, since he would have to carry much of the burden of preparing teachers for implementation.

Tne ES project officer who had first visited the district the previous December immediately after her appointment, dealt with all these problems from Washington, D.C.. As the issue became more heated in August,

the national ES program director also became involved. From his Washington office he telephoned several of the River District trustees to discuss the matter of local project leadership. The trustees interpreted this approach as a deliberate attempt to alienate the board from the administration and to circumvent normal decision-making procedures in the district. They refused to talk privately, inviting him instead to come to Spring Creek to attend the next public school board meeting where the issue could be publicly debated and, if necessary, submitted to formal vote. He accepted their invitation and came to Spring Creek on August 7 and 8.[2]

As a result of the public and private discussions which were held with him then, the superintendents felt that the issue would be resolved in the district's favor. But although they understood that the position of project director could remain as planned, i.e., administratively subordinate to the superintendent's, the ES director informed them by telephone from Washington a few days later that this was not his understanding. A tense debate was intermittently carried on by telephone during the rest of the month, but the issue was never formally resolved.

In the meantime, none of the project's plan had been formally changed either, and the deadlines set by the federal project officer for final revisions passed by. There was a real possibility that the local project would be cancelled, and in fact, cancellation was suggested by the ES director and was openly discussed in telephone conversations. By this point, the effects of budget changes, demands for changes in the plan, cancellation of the career education workshop, and the controversy over local project administration had so strained federal-local relationships and drained local enthusiasm for the project that its successful implementation in the classrooms was further jeopardized. Local officials wondered

if cancellation would not be the best choice at this point. According to the superintendents, the district had already invested so heavily in the plan that they would "go it alone," if necessary and implement the project without funding from Washington.[3]

For a few weeks there was virtually no communication between River District and Washington. Then, in early September word was received that a new federal project officer had been appointed as liaison with the district and would be visiting shortly. The identity of the new officer, however, was not immediately announced--"kept secret," some felt, which led some of the locals to speculate about the sex, operating style, and even the color of the new appointee. They were half expecting some sort of dramatic change from past officers, perhaps someone who could deal more sensitively with the problems plaguing the local project. This change could mark the beginning of a different and potentially more productive relationship between district and federal officials. Because it seemed unlikely that the feds would appoint a new project officer just to complete the previously threatened cancellation of the project, local officials were guardedly hopeful. Meanwhile, some of the immediate pressures within the local school district on administrators had diminished, enabling them to turn their attentions once again toward project implementation as best it could now be achieved. But whatever happened next, they felt, hinged on the personality, the objectives, and ultimately on the style of the new project officer from Washington.

A NEW STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION START-UP

River District's new project officer arrived in Spring Creek on September 17 and introduced herself at the regular school board meeting

that day. Sensing the feelings of anxiety about her role and style, she immediately put aside the conflicts of the past few months by asserting that she was determined to develop a better working relationship with the district. She put everyone at ease by telling them about her past experience at both the community and federal levels of the educational establishment, and by her pragmatic manner of addressing the problems of the past and the prospects for the future of Experimental Schools in River District. In one aside, for example, she bluntly stated that NIE should never have sent her predecessor, "a girl, to do woman's work!" "Trust me," she said, as she gave center stage to the immediate problems of implementation. In order to resolve some of the budgetary problems that remained, she had brought an NIE fiscal expert with her, promising that the funding problems would also be straightened out. In the meantime, it was necessary to develop new strategies for immediate implementation, since school had already begun.

It was apparent that this new officer's initial style and rhetoric, at least, were quite different from what the locals had experienced from other federal officials. Here, it seemed, was someone with a more sensitive and pragmatic (less utopic) approach to change (see Chapter Four), someone more in tune with local cultural proclivities and values, someone with whom they quite possibly could work to put the project back together and begin its implementation as planned.

Development of Contingency Plans

The superintendents, administrative principals, trustees, new project director and the school-community coordinator discussed with the new ES project officer and the NIE fiscal officer ways to proceed.

Although not wanting to undermine the overall integrity of the original plan, they did agree informally (and not unexpectedly) that career education would be the district's "number one priority" for implementation. Local interest in career education was evident as early as the initial letter of interest in April 1972. In that application letter, school administrators had already committed themselves to implementing a curricular program oriented toward occupational preparedness of pupils instead of the more traditional academic programming that the new district had inherited from its previously disparate components. They were determined as well, in the words of the assistant superintendent, to avoid a "shotgun approach" and they agreed to begin by pursuing only selected parts of the plan, holding other parts in abeyance for at least a year. This strategy was at the core of their new contingency plans for the first year of implementation.

Each of the five components of the project plan was considered by them in turn, and within a few days the contingency plans were roughed out. The strategies for implementing each of the components, in order of their priority to district officials, were as follows.

Career education. It was decided that the focus of the career education component during the first year would be in grades one through six. The remainder of the component, that for grades seven through twelve, would be stressed more strongly during the second year, concurrent with the beginning of the ETD-career education satellite project for junior high school classes (see Chapter Three).

Because teachers had been denied the benefits of a summer curriculum workshop for this component, short workshops during the year were planned, and the new local project director was expected to work closely

with them to design some much needed curriculum materials. Each of the seven elementary schools of the district was to be represented at these small workshops by one teacher selected by the principal. That teacher would then return to his or her school to act as a staff team leader in cooperation with the guidance counselors and the project's central staff in Spring Creek.

The emphasis on career education in the first year at the primary and intermediate levels would stress the development of attitudes towards, and awareness of, the world of work, without changing the substance of the existing curricula. Beginning in the second year of implementation, in grades seven and eight, the project focus would be on developing students' understanding of broad areas of the economy (11 career clusters) through their regular classroom work, as well as on field trips, by the use of community resource people, and through the ETD-career education satellite programs. Simultaneously in grades nine and ten, a program exploring careers would be launched to emphasize classroom instruction in woodworking, electricity, typing, sewing, cooking, and similar subjects--not much different, really, from the existing vocational education programs, including home economics. Also in the second year, a "career-education-broad-skills program" would be implemented in grades eleven and twelve, with emphasis on specialized instruction, guidance counseling, and on-the-job training. And finally, at the post-secondary level, the community-school coordinator would implement a community education program with a strong vocational orientation.[4] To oversee all of these activities, the project director would serve concurrently as the career education coordinator with the option (never realized) of employing a second career education coordinator in the future.

Community involvement. This component was the only one besides career education to be assigned a coordinator. Community involvement was intended to encourage citizens to engage in meaningful dialogue with school officials and to facilitate a closer rapport between the schools and the community at large. This goal had already been partly realized during planning through the community coordinating committee. With the appointment of the community-school coordinator, community education classes and committee involvement became a major focus of the district's ES activities, as the coordinator set about to establish evening and out-of-school courses and activities for community members. His stated goals included opening public school facilities for community events and offering a variety of special interest classes, vocational and avocational, to all interested persons, young and old.

Objectives and activities for community involvement during the first year of implementation were described in the district's first quarterly contract report of September 1973:

> The success of community education and community school programs depend on the individual who coordinates the program and activities between the school and community. He must become a catalyst for change, cooperation, understanding and unity in the community.
>
> The community school program then must be organized and developed in stages. A great amount of time and effort must be spent by the coordinator to create and develop a successful community school program...
>
> For the first year, efforts for community education will be centered in two attendance areas; Spring Creek and Copperton. Using Copperton as a pilot, programs for the other towns will be developed for subsequent years. Some activities will also be planned for Rim.[5]

Among the year's objectives, informing the citizens of the district about the community education offerings came first, followed by

compiling lists of facilities and resources available in each community and school, taking a needs survey for future activities, and beginning classes in Spring Creek and Copperton.

This choice of first-year implementation in the southern towns was justified as part of the overall administration strategy to avoid the "shotgun approach" by concentrating energies in one locale and starting out on a small scale. The logistics involved in serving the northern towns, 40 to 100 miles distant from project offices in Spring Creek was a major factor in deciding on the "southern strategy." In time, however, it became a point of contention among northern sector residents who claimed that administration of school district affairs was dominated by Spring Creek.

Cultural education. The strategy was to implement cultural education in the first year only to the degree that the citizens coordinating committee members, project staff, school administrators, and teachers could comfortably incorporate it into their schedules. It was not considered a high enough priority to hire a full-time coordinator; rather, the community education coordinator was assigned to oversee it along with the other component. One of his first tasks was to organize a special citizen-educator fine arts committee to develop cultural activity plans and to facilitate and evaluate cultural programming. Cultural education was described in the ES plan as a program:

> 1. to bring several areas of the fine arts (dance, theater, art, music, and poetry) to the people of the district,
>
> 2. to provide representative experiences in the arts for all students, with opportunities to see live performances locally and at least once each year at the nearby state university,

3. to incorporate the arts into the general educational program,

4. to develop instructional units to provide art learning experiences for school pupils, and

5. to involve regular classroom teachers in the process of fine arts curriculum development.

Many of the services and equipment available from the district's instructional media center would be used, as would many fine arts resources from the state university. This was the only component of the project that involved the planned use of outside resources.

Special services. Special services is essentially undefined in the project plan beyond this one sentence: "To provide special services so that each student might better understand and adjust himself to the physical, social, and psychological world in which he lives." At the beginning of the first implementation year, special services translated into the employment of full-time guidance counselors in the high schools of the three largest attendance areas of the district. This goal was accomplished prior to the beginning of the 1973-1974 school year, largely without the involvement of the newly appointed ES project staff. In addition, speech and hearing teachers were also hired by the district. By and large, this component was designed to be implemented independent of the rest of the ES project. Because it was unrelated to the major thrust of the ES plan, it was considered at the district level to be the direct responsibility of the assistant superintendent. At the attendance area level it was to be administered by the administrative principals and their subordinate principals.

The ES project director was given no authority or responsibility in the area of special services, other than to encourage and facilitate

coordination of the guidance program with the ES career education program. The counselors were expected to assist the ES director in carrying out certain project operations and to gather unspecified research data within their own schools. However, these sorts of responsibilities were definitely subordinate to their other, more traditional guidance work with students. There were great expectations for the counselors' participation in the ES over the long run, but for the first year, at least, their participation would be minimal.

Curriculum coordination and evaluation. Development of the curriculum component was considered to be an on-going process under the direct supervision of the assistant superintendent and, like special services, was to be beyond the authority of the project director. Great importance was accorded verbally to this component in the plan, but in the first year, it received substantially little attention. It was never given a very high priority, and was virtually ignored during the rest of the project as well, except when an evaluation plan was needed later. Had new curricula been developed for the project, coordination and evaluation would have been more important.

In sum, selected aspects of only three components--career education, community involvement, and cultural education--figured importantly in the strategy of the first year's contingency plan, with career education given top priority. Over time, the special services component came to be redefined almost exclusively as guidance counseling. Some redefinition of cultural education and community involvement also occurred. The latter, for example, became equated with community education, gradually replacing citizen involvement in committee work. And the curriculum evaluation and coordination component was almost totally ignored.

Implementation Problems

The quarterly contract reports prepared for submission to NIE during the first year dealt almost exclusively with the three components of career, community, and cultural education, depicting a district in which the project goals appeared to be actively pursued and in which teachers and students alike appeared committed to the program and busy at making it go. They were replete with lists of assignments, classroom work, and out-of-school activities in career education; the dates and times of fine arts programs in music, dance, poetry, theater, and art; and the development of community-school classes at Spring Creek and Copperton. But beneath the offical reporting on paper of activities and progress, very real and serious problems in the administration and the implementation of the project persisted. The reports show no real curriculum developments or improvements, nor any coordinated efforts to knit project efforts together in comprehensive or innovative ways.

Each administrative principal prepared a portion of the report dealing with ES activities in his respective schools. Typically their comments were brief. Feelings about the project were nonetheless expressed openly, some enthusiastic (principally from Union and Wister), some relatively neutral (at Spring Creek), and some negative or even hostile (at Copperton). The Copperton area principal's comments reveal underlying concerns not only about ES but about school district unification generally. He expressed a strong desire for less central project office control, that is, for more "local control." His comments exemplified a residual tension dating to earlier anti-consolidation issues. Here, in his comments, is evidence of a local center-periphery relationship reflective of, and certainly exacerbating, the much larger local-federal controversies of

recent months. It shows, above all, that district-wide unity and support for ES was, at best, only tenuous.

The following are four examples of area administrative principals' comments, excerpted from quarterly reports prepared for NIE:

> From Union: "The teachers were quite enthusiastic" about a short career education workshop they attended in December, while a visiting cultural program was evaluated as "different and interesting."
>
> From Wister: "The elementary teachers and students have responded with enthusiasm to the idea of career education bulletin boards," and a visiting musical ensemble was rated "great...Hoping to receive more high quality cultural programs into our schools."
>
> From Spring Creek: At mid-year the project was rated "negligible" and in a later report as "floundering...Yet things are happening. Perhaps we're seeing the 'small picture' rather than the large one."
>
> From Copperton: "There are many materials that are being sent to us on Career Education that we have no space to place. As this program is being set up, it is of little use to Copperton."
>
> "I would like to use some of this money to develop a new Math Program for the High School...that will fill the need of the Ranching and Timber Industry. Eighty percent of our graduates remain in the Area and are employed by either Ranching or Timbering."

Early in the implementation phase, the district coordinating committee (originally formed to assist in planning) was divided into two groups to assist in the implementation and evaluation of the project. One group was concerned with career education and the other with cultural (or "fine arts") education.[6]

The career education committee met periodically to review the project's goals and strategies and to help set the future course of this component. Meanwhile, the project director set out aggressively to coordinate and implement career activities across the entire district. Among them were small workshops for northern area school personnel,

ostensibly coordinated and directed by him from Spring Creek. These workshops owed much of their success--expressed in enthusiastic teacher participation and the subsequent adoption of some new curriculum ideas and techniques in their classrooms--to the obvious need for them. There was nothing especially new or innovative about the workshops; they resembled the sort of small in-service workshops common to many school districts and which River District teachers had all experienced before. Their simplicity and familiarity, in fact, is what made them so well-received--they were what teachers in River District were used to doing. Afterward, some teachers spoke of their usefulness and importance in this context as "finally doing something" about ES.

The cultural (i.e., "fine arts") education committee was composed of art, music, and English teachers and several community members who were interested in and supportive of the five arts. As with some other aspects of the project, the major support for cultural education came from the two southern attendance areas of Spring Creek and Copperton. The committee met periodically, and worked well together. Early in the year they established two priorities, to bring cultural events into the district and to facilitate student participation in cultural events beyond the district. (Most fine arts events originated at the University of Wyoming.) In the quarterly reports to NIE, these events were all reported as being successful. They consisted of nine major cultural-exposure activities including choral, dance, and instrumental performances and the use of guest artists and poets in the classrooms. They received wide attention and generally enthusiastic support across the entire district.

Community involvement, the third component, involved the active participation of citizens on committees and in community education classes. Within a few weeks of the beginning of project implementation in September 1973, the coordinator had begun organizing adult evening classes in the district's southern communities in such subjects as photography, surveying, upholstery, art, men's gym, and slimnastics.

These classes were taught by volunteers and were well attended; hence they were successful according to the informal measures of success which the district traditionally employed--i.e., good turnout and favorable comments. The community education activities received the endorsement of school administrators as well because they were virtually free of controversy and they represented low financial investment in return for high visibility and good public relations--important considerations in a district struggling to maintain some semblance of unity. Furthermore, community education events, generally scheduled in the evenings, did not interfere with regularly scheduled school activities nor with the work of the classroom teachers.

The community education coordinator was respected for his organizing abilities, his sensitive approach to school system politics, and his pleasant personality. He was energetic and idealistic, and set about with vigor to develop a strong program. His efforts attracted the attention of school administrators and commmunity persons widely; one northern administrative principal (perhaps in a bid to attract the program to northern area schools more quickly) remarked in a quarterly report that, "We rate community school classes as good for the school image and valuable to the community," although none had yet been implemented in his area. In short, the community education coordinator and his goals for the project posed no threat to the established prerogatives of the school administrators.

Yet, in spite of the apparent progress in implementing ES project goals, problems in the administration of the project continued to undermine its effectiveness. For one, the nature of community involvement was changing, and secondly, the role and personality of the local project director were being seriously questioned.

Administrative Problems

The first of these problems, change in the nature of community involvement, involved a move away from active citizen participation in career and cultural education committee work toward more passive involvement as members of community education classes. Although initially committee meeting were well attended, as the year progressed citizen committee members became frustrated by what they perceived to be a lack of purpose and clarity about their role in the project and a lack of interest in their suggestions on the part of administrators and teachers. Quite simply, implementation of the plan was now interpreted by educational officials as the responsibility of project staff, school administrators, and the teachers in particular. Administrators and teachers, for their parts, expressed discomfort at receiving advice from lay people about implementation, mirroring a sentiment observed earlier in the initial reluctance of the School Board to establish lay committees.

Events at a career education committee meeting held in Union in February, 1974, exemplified the kind of situation which made the citizenry uncomfortable. The meeting was held to review career education implementation strategies to date and to help decide the future course

of that component. It was presided over by its lay chairman from Spring Creek, but was dominated numerically (14 to 5) and vocally by teachers, administrators, and project staff, who followed an agenda devoted almost exclusively to classroom activities and who, as some observed, talked over the heads of the lay participants. Thereafter citizen interest and involvement dwindled even more as project implementation became the exclusive domain of the professional educators.

There was not yet, however, any formal initiative to disband the citizen committees, for in addition to their public relations function they also served (if only nominally) to show federal officials that the mandate to involve the people was still being honored in River District. After attending a citizen committee meeting, a visiting federal project officer openly questioned their efficacy and utility. Eventually, active citizen interest in committee work declined so that by year's end the need for this type of involvement was being openly questioned by the project director and the central office administrators.

The second problem was the nature of relationships between school district administrators and the local ES project director. As both a newcomer to River District and a non-educator, the local director was at a distinct disadvantage in River District. As early as his industrial arts workshops in December 1973 some administrative principals took noticeable exception to what they perceived to be overzealous and sometimes insensitive behavior on his part toward established procedures and chain of command in schools. The general feelings among administrators was that ultimate responsibility for the supervision of their teachers, whether in classrooms or workshops, was within their own administrative jurisdiction, not that of the central office in Spring Creek, a reflection of the

localism and territoriality that earlier had plagued school district unification efforts.

In his attempt to establish some hegemony over ES project affairs in the district, the director succeeded only in alienating the very administrators whose support he needed, and by mid-winter 1973-74, working relationships between him and the outlying school administrators were clearly strained. They were no better in the central office where the superintendents reiterated the concerns of their administrative principals and even approached the federal project officer for advice about firing the director before his year's contract was up. In February he was notified not to expect renewal of his contract at year's end, and in June he was formally replaced by his subordinate, the more personable community education coordinator.

The new director-designate had learned by observation what the limitations of the project directorship were in terms of his control over component activities and in his relations with school administrators and teachers. He was more careful, and succeeded in serving two full years as director.

Despite their contention that implementation activities were rightly their responsibility, some administrative principals, principals, and teachers complained privately during the first year that ES project activities imposed some annoying responsibilities. It was an "extra" from their way of looking at it which only exacerbated the problems associated with recent unification and overcrowding.

Some teachers and area administrators questioned if, under the circumstances, the ES project was worth all the trouble.[7] Such sentiments were understandable since, without the summer workshop, they had

had little time to develop the necessary curriculum for implementation, and prior to that, most of them had had relatively little involvement in preparations for the project beyond making some suggestions for the plan. As a result, ES was getting short-changed in the schools.

But, while there were bothersome internal problems in River District, local-federal relations were, nonetheless, noticeably improving. The third project officer was replaced during the winter of 1973-1974 by a man who served in this capacity until the end of 1975 (a factor which in itself helped create, stabilize, and keep relatively good rapport). His pragmatic advice, useful technical assistance, and sensitive understanding of local values were much like those of the pragmatic advocate who had preceeded him. His style of advocacy, and his sensitive brokering between NIE and the school district, had significant effects on both the morale of the staff in the district and on the remaining implementation of the project, especially in the subsequent redevelopment of an evaluation plan.

Second Implementation Year

Activities for the second year of project implementation began during the summer of 1974. Unlike the events of the previous summer which brought the River District ES project to the brink of cancellation, the summer of 1974 saw a supportive reiteration and revitalization of project goals and objectives by school administrators, project staff, federal officers, and for the first time, a significant number of classroom teachers.

Planning for the summer workshop had begun early in the spring. The new project director's major goal for summer was to regain some of the momentum lost by the cancellation of the career workshop the year before. He designed a new "Small Schools Workshop" which was held for a week in July at a picturesque and sunny mountain retreat east of Spring Creek. It attracted approximately half of the school district's teaching staff representing all attendance area schools, all of the district administrators, and a few school board trustees and patrons. Career and cultural education were the principal topics, featuring outside experts in career education, including ETD satellite technologists from NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration), advisors from the Wyoming Department of Education, and a local industrialist. For the cultural education component, several arts and humanities professors were brought in from nearby universities. The federal project officer also attended. He started the workshop off with a spirited keynote address, encouraging everyone to think seriously and work constructively to solve local problems of educational development. Out of the workshop came two major program additions to the project, and some significant changes in personnel.

One addition was a system of $50 mini-grants for teachers who designed creative and innovative projects for classroom or school use. The mini-grants were of two types--those which were directly related to the ES components of career and cultural education, and those which were not. No one ever questioned the distinction between ES and non-ES grants; the ES components were simply perceived as being in a category of their own, distinct from the rest of the school's regular curricula.

The second change was the expansion of a formerly small classroom humanities curriculum at Spring Creek high school and its enthusiastic adoption by teachers at the Union and Wister high schools in the northern sector. Teacher interest in a humanities curriculum which integrated Euro-American art, music, and literature in both their historic and contemporary forms, an inherently "cultural" pedogogy, was so heightened during the summer workshop that it soon became widely accepted as an integral part of the ES project under the aegis of cultural education.

Although one administrator was seriously concerned about deviating from the plan, he was eventually convinced of the merits of an expanded humanities curriculum under the cultural education component. It was a boon to public relations and was often cited as an example of the district's progress in the area of curriculum development and coordination, and even by some as evidence of the overall success of the ES project.

Several new staff positions were also added to the project after the 1974 summer workshop--a new community school intern and a so-called "project facilitator" for the north, and a combined half-time evaluator/guidance counselor for the entire district. All three of these new employees were brought into the district from outside, the first two directly out of nearby universities with relatively little teaching, administrating, coordinating, or facilitating experience. The evaluator/guidance counselor was an experienced teacher from a nearby district. Each new staff member was assigned to live in a town other than Spring Creek in an effort to disperse project and staff visibility more equitably throughout the district, and thus negate the public and private allegations of Spring Creek's centricity in district administration generally, and in ES project affairs more specifically.

Although the initial enthusiasm for these three new people and their roles was high, their success varied. The new community-school coordinator survived the longest on the project--for a full two years. His responsibilities were the most clearly defined and he was personally and professionally the least threatening of the three new persons hired. He was responsible for expanding the already well-established community-school program to the northern towns of the district--Union, Wister, and Rim--which were heavily impacted socially by the effects of the population boom, and which previously had been ignored in the ES project. A strong commitment to his job, good organizational abilities, and a pleasant personality were attributes which, like those of his predecessor, were a distinct advantage. And although he encountered inevitable frustrations working as a newcomer in the district with townspeople and educators who guarded their territories carefully, he was generally successful in establishing and maintaining the necessary rapport and respect to succeed at his work.

The position of "project facilitator" was created to help improve the process of project implementation in the classrooms, especially in the northern sector schools. As the woman who was hired to fill this position later described it, her role was to "remedy the previous lack of personnel operating on the 'grass roots' level" of the project. She was to serve as an "idea source," to help design and implement component curricula and activities with and for teachers, to prepare and make available a wide range of resource materials, and to improve the image and role of the project in the schools generally.

Within a few months, however, she concluded that the existing relations between project and school staff and the "organizational

peculiarities" of the project, as she put it, precluded her being able to do her job. A majority of the teachers, she said, were "politely disinterested, cooly wary, or downright hostile" towards her, and principals and head teachers treated her with "either cautious neutrality or varying degrees of...antagonism." She was caught in the familiar bind, hired by and accountable to the project leaders, yet expected to work closely with teachers and administrators who jealously guarded their classrooms and schools from all outside interference, including the ES project.

She became convinced that there was essentially no coherent project to facilitate at all, and in February 1975 she wrote this summary assessment of ES in River District:

> It had become glaringly apparent that no curriculum guides existed for any of the fine arts, and that there was no district-wide continuity in objectives or skills progression in any subject area. I was bewildered by the prospects of designing units and materials to expand exposure to career and cultural education when the inclusion of these areas--or their total absence--in the basic curriculum depended entirely upon the interest and information of each individual teacher. I was to enrich a program that didn't exist.

Her critical assessment was eventually reiterated privately in school district documents, but it was never articulated by the superintendents who were principally responsible for it, in print or within the hearing of project staff, the researcher, or the feds.

The cultural education program continued in 1974-75 much as it had begun, with the humanities curriculum as well as fine arts performances and events held both within and outside of the district. An addition to the fine arts activities during these years was the organization of a large community choral group and a music and arts festival at Spring Creek.[8] But, while the humanities program was gaining support, and although performances were well received by citizens and students,

the cultural educational component was actually beginning to lose the administration's support. Administrators clearly favored traditional programs and existing curricula--programs which confined learning activities primarily to the classroom, were directed by regular teachers, and required little budgetary or administrative involvement. The new humanities curriculum borrowed from Spring Creek and introduced to other schools after the 1974 summer workshop was just that -- traditional, classroom oriented, and inexpensive to operate. Virtually every other aspect of cultural education with which the district experimented from 1973 to 1975 cost extra money and cut into the ES budget.

This sort of conservative attitude about cultural education reflected the idea among administrators, at least, that if ES component activities interfered with traditional classroom activities, if they involved extra cost, or if they could not be seen to have immediate and definite payoffs for teachers in traditional roles, they probably should not be continued. The time was approaching when the school district officials would have to decide what they could afford to phase into their regular operating budget (in line with the original ES program goals of integrating successful ES components into the ongoing system and budget). And, although cultural education appeared to be a success by virtue of its popular appeal, it was a "failure" in the eyes of the administration, for the reasons mentioned above. Furthermore, the component had lost an important source of support when the cultural education citizen committee stopped meeting.

In June 1975, the position of "project facilitator" was abolished and promptly forgotten amidst the debris of ES in River District. The woman who had tried unsuccessfully to facilitate curriculum

development for ES was reassigned as an elementary teacher at Union. In June 1976, she left the district altogether.

Of the three new project staff positions created that year, that of a local project evaluator was potentially the most important. The local director once referred to the development of local education capability as an example of the "emerging strength" of ES in River District when it became apparent to him that much of the success of the project would be determined by how well evaluation was performed. Within six months of its beginning, however, school officials were sufficiently upset with the poor performance of the first evaluator and concerned that more and better evaluation should be done, that they replaced the first appointee with a full-time evaluator, insisting that this second evaluator live and work full time in Spring Creek. The first evaluator remained in Copperton as a half-time counselor on full pay. But in June, she, too, left the district, and was replaced by a full-time counselor-cum-psychometrician. (Evaluation efforts are considered more fully in Chapter Six.)

Restructuring The Project

During the second and into the third years of the project, all five of the district's original component parts were reconsidered and in some instances altered to accommodate changes in local priorities. The scope of career education and of special (guidance) services, for example, was expanded, while cultural education, curriculum evaluation and coordination, and community involvement goals were changed in important ways.

Career education was formally introduced into the junior and senior high schools district wide in the fall of 1974, simultaneous with the start-up of the ETD-career education satellite project at Spring Creek. The satellite project was coordinated by the director of the instructional media center and programs originally broadcast to a receiver at Spring Creek junior high school were reproduced in the media center on video tape equipment purchased with ES project funds, then rebroadcast by cassette play-back units in junior high schools district wide. For a year, this special programming provided supplementary curriculum materials for the career education component in junior high school classes. In Wister, and to some extent in Union, this TV curriculum was virtually all that was offered to junior high students in career education. At Spring Creek, the whole project was more visible and more support for it was evident in the classrooms.

In addition to classroom programming, special broadcasts on topics of community interest were received live in Spring Creek one evening each week throughout the 1974-75 academic year. Area citizens were invited to view these broadcasts in the junior high school building, but attendance was uniformly and disappointingly low.

The special services component of the ES plan was augmented in 1974 with the assignment of the new half-time guidance counselor to Copperton schools. The following year, guidance counseling efforts throughout the district were augmented with the addition of a skilled psychometrician to the staff. The latter had virtually no active involvement in ES project affairs, however. By October 1975, the administrative council had met and decided to discontinue funding for most fine arts activities (except humanities and regular music and art programs). Ironically, the

district's formal written justification for dropping the cultural education component (in a report prepared for NIE) was "because of the distance involved in getting programs to the schools." In this instance, "distance" can be equated with added expense.

Community involvement component goals were also altered significantly during the second and third years of implementation. On the one hand, community education classes grew in popularity, the number of classes offered was increased, and the scope of the program of adult education was expanded throughout the district. This continued to be considered by many as the most successful of all project implementation efforts in the district by reason of its relatively low cost, good public relations payoffs, and effective leadership on the part of the two men assigned to coordinate and direct it.

On the other hand, citizen participation on project committees had declined markedly. By the fall of 1974, the few remaining citizen coordinating committee members were openly questioning their role in district affairs, and the committee system was quietly abandoned by a decision of the administrative council. The administrators seemed to have decided that, at least as far as ES project implementation was concerned, citizen committees were indeed like the hump on a camel, a nuisance, as one trustee had so picturesquely phrased it earlier. Citizen involvement in evaluation of school programs was still considered necessary, but it was not until planning for the final two years of the project (1976-1978) that it was seriously considered again.

In October of 1975, the superintendents and project director presented a list of 64 career education activities to the visiting federal

project officer (and another federal officer who was expected to replace him). Although this list represented the district's progress toward a comprehensive and expanded curriculum, the project officer bluntly characterized it as a "laundry list," devoid of structure, with "nothing to hang on." He admonished the district officials to reconsider structure, coordination and unity of purpose before submitting a final revised plan to NIE for renegotiation the following spring.

Although the superintendents, the district's primary grantsmen, had been reluctant to publicly admit to skepticism or failure, it was becoming obvious that if the ES project were to continue, more local-level participation and direction in its classroom implementation would have to be encouraged. That is, they would have to allow more local area autonomy in planning and directing project activities and in financial accountability. With regard to the tension between centralization and local autonomy, the project's evaluation component was particularly problematic. For example, the guidance counselors throughout the district were to design a uniform approach to testing and measuring pupil skill achievement annually district wide for incorporation in the project's evaluation design. However, school officials were unable to come to any consensus about which of the many available testing systems to implement, each arguing for the merits of the particular system that had traditionally been used in his schools. Traditionalism and localism prevailed; continuity with the past and the retention of local schools' prerogatives seemed to take precedence over uniformity of purpose in River District.

CONCLUSIONS

Project implementation from 1973 to 1976 encompassed considerable activity in the educational and administrative affairs of River Unified School District. From the euphoria following funding in the spring of 1973, to the disappointment over contract negotiations, through the severe disillusionment over the events of summer 1973, to the refreshing assignment of two new and helpful federal project officers in the fall and winter of that year, the locals experienced a process of project development that was truly dynamic, if wobbly. Many of the early implementation issues and problems were eventually either forgotten or worked out with technical assistance and wise counsel from the third and fourth ES project officers and with a considerable amount of flexibility and creativity demonstrated by both administrators and teachers in River District.

Early in 1975, in a report assessing the project to date, the local project director likened ES in River District to a mosaic fitted with bits and pieces but with no clearly discernible image. There had been project-related activity in many classrooms and schools over the previous two and a half years of implementation, and a lot of energy had been expended at the administration level, centrally and in the outlying local school offices. But there was very little district-wide cooperation of efforts or unity of purpose toward ES project goals to show for it. The project director's verbal assessment, "There is no program," echoed the sentiments of the project facilitator who spoke of "a program that didn't exist."

Centralization of effort was a key issue in the ES project. Very early on, the central staff had learned how difficult it was to express

themselves with authority or to impose ES component goals on teachers and administrators. As a result of efforts on behalf of greater centralization, the first project director had been dismissed and replaced, the facilitator's role had failed, antagonism against project implementation in the schools was high, and commitment to ES goals and objectives was low. These were significant reactions to what was perceived as undesired "extra" responsibilities as well as "Spring Creek dominance" in the project.

Given this scenario, the superintendents were reluctant to exert strong central authority in the area of curriculum coordination and evaluation. To have pursued a more aggressive course of action toward standardization or centralization of curriculum planning and evaluation would have created intolerable administrative and territorial antagonisms. Better to let sleeping dogs lie--a sentiment that belies local adherence to the Protestant ethic which values concealment of conflict and the avoidance of problems.

The ES project served as a sort of barometer of the sentiment of area administrators against centralized control and authority. It came as no surprise when, in April 1975, the administrative council took formal action to decentralize the ES project. They voted to turn virtually full control of ES component programming and budgeting to each area administrative principal. This action is described in the final refunding plan for 1976-1978, written later that spring:

> ...attendance areas are individually developing programs to meet local needs in accordance with project goals and objectives.
>
> The administrative principals are taking the primary responsibility for [ongoing] project planning, implementation and evaluation so that the project is better integrated with [their own] school programs.

At a time when the project director idealistically thought that he still had time to turn the faltering project around and implement some sort of limited success, the shift in local priorities from a need for unity to the more traditional demands for decentralization effectively cancelled what little authority he had held. He was effectively demoted to record keeper and report writer by a formal vote of the administrative council. He also retained the powerless role of informal liaison with the federal project officer (the assistant superintendent remained the formal contact),[9] and served as coordinator of the community-school program for the southern towns of the district. These changes left him disheartened; the local project seemed to him to have been gutted.

But from another point of view, decentralization also represented an attempt to move ES project implementation further in the direction of institutionalization and integration with existing local educational priorities. Tying whatever existed in the name of the ES project more closely to the locally controlled attendance area programs would help it become more a part of the local education system. In this sense, decentralization at this time was responsive to the original intent of Experimental Schools.

CHAPTER SIX

LOCAL EVALUATION EFFORTS

River District's traditions of local autonomy, which were reinforced with the official decentralization of ES project management in the spring of 1975, posed serious problems for local evaluation efforts. Even if consensus could be reached as to an appropriate method of evaluation to employ, there was the monumental problem of developing a mechanism for district-wide communication, exacerbated by the geographic logistics involved in such a large district.

Evaluation was not, however, an entirely new concept in River District, although local administrators and teachers felt themselves somewhat at a loss to respond to the specific (and sometimes non-specific) requirements of the ES program. This chapter examines the tradition of informal evaluation in River District in the context of its role in shaping the district's response to ES evaluation priorities. Because evaluation was a major ES goal, because it caused so much concern and anxiety over the life of the ES project in River District, and because it directed so much attention away from the primary intent of Experimental Schools--the implementation of change and improvement in classroom education--an examination of local evaluation efforts is important. As a case study within a case study, the following account sheds further light on the difficulties of introducing educational change at a cultural distance.

THE REQUIREMENT TO EVALUATE

Evaluation is an obsession among many educators. They evaluate curriculum, school physical plants, athletic programs, patron satisfaction, student performance and achievement, and fellow teachers and administrators--virtually everything related to their main purpose in life--education.

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For the Experimental Schools program, evaluation was a primary objective from the very beginning, built in at every turn. Every action of the federal project officers, for example, was based on evaluative judgments; their decisions to monitor, advise, and/or assist were based on some sort of evaluative criteria, usually quite informal. Formally, on the other hand, ES evaluation, by design, was to exist at two levels: locally as an integral part of each project contract (which is what this chapter is all about) and externally through a separate contract (that with Abt Associates, which called for a researcher living on site to document and evaluate local project efforts; see Chapter Eight) to evaluate various aspects of all the local projects.[1]

For local evaluation, the competition announcement of March 1972 states that:

> A major purpose of the small rural Experimental Schools projects is to discover means to improve rural education generally. Therefore, each project must have built-in methods of evaluation and documentation, in terms of its own purpose and goals...[The program] will also assist each selected project in developing an effective local procedure for evaluating and documenting the project... Its purpose is to provide a means whereby what is learned can be made available to other rural districts.

But, like the concept of "comprehensiveness," this brief statement sheds little light on what ES officials conceived "evaluation" to be in operational terms.

In River District evaluation received considerable attention, first during the planning phase in 1972 and early 1973, and again beginning in 1974 and 1976 during project implementation. But each time the issue of evaluation was formally addressed, serious problems arose. As in other aspects of the project, most energy toward developing this component was expended at the highest levels of project and school district administration. A great amount of time was spent in debating the meaning of

evaluation and how it could best be accomplished within the unique context of the district, given the locally cherished values and assumptions about change and the district's past experiences with evaluation.

THE ANTECEDENTS OF LOCAL EVALUATION

One measure of program or project success is determined by assessing the goals and objectives it is designed to meet. The basic premise of such evaluation research, its overriding purpose, is to measure the effects of a program against the goals it has set out to accomplish (Weiss 1972).

Formal evaluation was not new to River District, but traditionally it involved only the testing of students to measure achievement and the judging of staff performance for purposes of making promotion and tenure decisions. Through its participation in the ES program, the district was being encouraged to develop a formal mechanism for program evaluation, one with which they had had little prior experience. The original announcement of the ES competition directed the applicant districts to develop methods for evaluation and documentation of their efforts "in terms of [their] own purposes and goals," and to incorporate them into the school system.

In response to the evaluation requirement local officials in River District began by interpreting it in terms of their previous experiences. Comments about evaluation in the district's April 1973 Letter of Interest are phrased largely in terms of curriculum, and, with little specificity, in terms of a broad appraisal of the status of the newly consolidated school district. The superintendents who drafted the letter spoke of (a) tapping resources of a nearby university for assistance in "curriculum evaluation and development;" they saw (b) "curriculum planning, development,

implementation, coordination and evaluation," together, as a "major weakness" of the existing educational program; they recognized (c) the need for a district-wide curriculum study involving staff and citizen committees; and they spoke vaguely of (d) evaluating organizational and managerial practices of the local schools.[2]

These observations say little, however, about the nature of evaluation in River District prior to Experimental Schools. By examining available data, a traditional pattern or mode of informal evaluation can be discerned which provides insight into antecedent evaluation experiences and into the problems of implementing a relatively non-traditional concept of evaluation after 1972. The traditional mode of evaluation was one with which local personnel were comfortable, one which met their immediate needs and the expectations of their constituents, as well as the purposes of making decisions about local educational operations.

By traditional mode of evaluation we mean a style of operation which functions almost automatically, unconsciously. It is inherently informal, subjective, and unstructured. And it is a style which is pervasive throughout River District and is certainly familiar in other school districts, large or small. It has existed for years, since long before the inception of the ES program, and it will likely continue to be the basis of evaluation efforts in River District for years to come.

One example of a traditional and informal style of evaluation is that of simply counting people and activities. This enumerative style is described in the River District ES plan in the context of assessing community involvement:

> There is a large attempt to involve the community in the project. It follows that there should be a corollary effort to assess that involvement. Less sophisticated ways would be to enumerate the uses of school buildings

by community groups; attendance at school-related functions; newspaper space devoted to school activities other then competitive sports; faculty outreach to the community in terms of service club participation, etc.; continuance of parent-advisory councils; cultural programs that are sponsored or initiated by the schools; greater community recognition of the need and support for special services offered by the school; and community sponsorship of varied recreational and leisure time pursuits of all age groups.

What distinguishes this so-called "less-sophisticated" way of data gathering is its informality--a quality that is integral to rural values and to a style of life in which intimate, face-to-face interrelationships are preferred over formality, pretentiousness, and sophistication. The locals especially desire informality at the conjunction of school and community, and this informal enumerative style of evaluation responds to the need to foster good community-school relations and to maintain stability. It is not disruptive of the status quo and it utilizes available resources, both people within the system and ideas which are developed locally. It reflects, and in turn supports, two local values or assumptions--first, that members of the school board and the administration are accountable first and foremost to the constituency of their local school district (i.e., the community), and second, that school board members and administrators alike are not likely to seriously question or disrupt the existing power structure of which they are a fundamental part.

In a March 1975 report to the superintendents and trustees of evaluation techniques commonly used in River District, the local evaluator noted that there was a considerable amount of informal data collection taking place. "Information," she said, "is gained through personal knowledge, informal observation, complaints from parents, recommendations of teachers, and administrators, etc., and is provided on request to Board members and Administrators." This sort of evaluation is analogous to what

Weiss (1972: 2) calls "offhand evaluations that rely on intuition, opinion, or trained sensibility." It is essentially based on what Donald Campbell calls the sort of "common sense knowing" that is often relied upon for evaluating education, i.e., knowledge based on what is believed to be true, sometimes called "presumptive knowledge," as opposed to theoretical knowledge which has gained the status of a "proven" in a more scientific sense (Campbell 1975).

In this traditional, common-sense style of evaluation, information is fed back to the decision makers of the school system through existing and informal channels of communication. It is restricted to participants already within the system, that is to "insiders," and it generally reflects or reiterates that which is already intuitively known about the system, especially local attitudes about how things "ought to be."

The quiet insistence of rural educators on traditional informality, accountability to local constituents, and attention to local needs, based on their own "common sense knowing," reflects a cultural context in which there is a generally strong suspicion of bureaucrats and "experts" from outside agencies. River District people often expressed the belief that many "fancy theories" have been foisted on them or are based on spurious knowledge about them, or on knowledge taken out of context. As western Americans, they perceive themselves and their rural, isolated social milieu as being distinct from the "national norm" which, they believe, reflects urban and predominantly Eastern culture or phenomena. They believe that anything less than what has been tested and proven locally, in a rural setting within their own state or region, is suspect. And, unless the results of school-wide testing instruments or questionnaires, for example, are clearly supportive of local self-image and values, they have often been dismissed as irrelevant and misleading.[3]

Although there is usually a dominant decision maker in the local system, such as a school superintendent, no one person is necessarily considered entirely responsible for the implementation of traditional evaluation, or for interpreting the data collected by it. Rather, all participants in the system--educators, trustees, patrons, and pupils alike--become involved, consciously or unconsciously, in enumerations of such things as community-school relationships. Local public sentiment about school programs is quietly and informally measured against the norms of what is believed to be "good" and "right" and "consistent" within the system of values that distinguishes River District and other small rural school districts like it.

Although the bulk of traditional evaluation experience in River District appears to have been informal in nature, it would be incorrect to assume that no formal evaluation was ever done. The local project evaluator, in her report of typical evaluation activities, has also spoken of formal data collection:

> All schools [in River District] have some means of formal data collection as well, although the amount and kind varies. Information about staff is collected, but the amount and specificity of that information varies from school to school. All schools print regular calendars, informing interested parties of scheduled events. Financial information is also regularly collected and reported.
>
> Program evaluation is initiated by the administrative principals (e.g., the yearly review of instructional objectives in Spring Creek elementary, the decision to implement a new reading program in Wister), and in response to requests by the Board (e.g., the evaluation of Spring Creek math program). Program evaluation is not done on a regular basis district-wide, and much of the evaluation in this area is informal.

Traditional evaluation in River District can be assessed in terms of its users and its purposes. In the main, the users of evaluation data

have been school system actors and constituents. The actors typically include those "with a possible oar in the evaluation," (Weiss 1972: 14), i.e., the trustees as policy makers; the superintendents as advisors to the board and overall directors of educational operations; and subordinate administrators and teachers, including special project and program directors and coordinators, as the practitioners of education. Constituents include the school district public, who as taxpayers, parents, or participants, are its major supporters and consumers (Weiss 1972: 14-15).

For local actors and constituents the traditional mode of evaluation in River District has essentially served the purpose for which it was intended--providing some information on which to base local operational decisions while maintaining a low profile and informality--consistent with local norms and without disturbing the power structure or disrupting the status quo. Traditional evaluation has been, for the most part, informal, qualitative, relatively unstructured, and limited in its scope and in its ability to produce hard data. It is a style of operation indisputably comfortable (non-threatening) in small social groups such as River District. It is responsive to local needs as they are customarily perceived. So long as local perceptions and beliefs are not altered by changes or agendas imposed from outside, beyond local control, and so long as the system remains relatively closed, intimate, and stable, it appears to be a sufficient and generally effective mode of operation. It is when other agendas, other evaluation needs, are imposed from outside that the traditional system begins to appear inadequate.

One observant federal project officer, noting the way in which administrators traditionally perform evaluations in River District, commented on the essential adequacy of their methods and the problems of

imposing agendas and judgments from the outside. River District, she said, has "the capacity to evaluate as it wishes to, what it's doing," based on its own needs and local priorities--i.e., on its own terms. Knowing this, she indicated, is a fundamental prerequisite to any outsider's attempt to critique local evaluation efforts. For example, a school administrator may propose to assess the success of a cultural or sports event by counting the number of people who buy tickets. "You and I," she said, "might say that that is not the measure of success, that it is not the number of people who attend but what is done to the soul of the child that counts." This sort of judgment implies that the head-counting style is not specific enough for measuring success and that it does not demonstrate "accountability;" but, accountable to whom, and specific to what measures? Continuing, she noted that:

> it is [a question of] to whom they are accountable, and they are accountable to their constituency. [From their perspective] they have the precise amount of specificity. All right. If Experimental Schools says, "What we are going to do is provide you with funds to try some things out, then we are going to watch what happens," we must take their system of accountability, specificity, sensitivity, and watch it happen and not impose another order...

Then, with almost prophetic accuracy, she concluded: "Imposing the other order is where our whole problem lies" (emphasis added).

The "other order" refers to the expectations or demands (purposes) of outside agents or agencies (users). In the instance of River District, the relevant outside agencies prior to Experimental Schools were of two types: (1) national agencies interested in assessing the implementation of projects they funded in local schools, and (2) state and regional agencies which evaluate local schools for accreditation purposes. Evaluations for outside agencies are typically organized around specific goals or

categories of educational programming, e.g., specific curricula, special projects, certain facilities.

User agencies of the first type are what Weiss (1972) calls the "funders" of educational enterprises. In River District, evaluation data generated for such funders is exemplified by several reports prepared in the late 1960's and early 1970's concerning the original ESEA Title III grant under which the district's instructional media center was developed. The evaluation of other entitlement program grants also fits this category.

Local administrators have also had experience with users of the second type, for school accreditation. Reports on file in Spring Creek relating to accreditation evaluation activities prior to 1972 discuss, for example, the nature of existing curricula (e.g., math and social studies programs), and the conditions of the physical plant (buildings and ground, laboratory and athletic equipment, school buses).

What is lacking in these reports and from past evaluations designed to meet outside needs in general is any sort of comprehensive, systemic evaluation. Rather, outside evaluation in River District was piecemeal, or categorical in nature; that is, it was specific to particular external agendas and goal-oriented. There is no evidence of attempts to assess all facets of the educational program comprehensively, as interlocking parts of a system. And, if the ES idea of evaluation can be reduced to a single, simple nomenclature, it is that of a system model.

System goals, writes Weiss (1972: 29) are "those that help maintain the viability of the program in its environment." Weiss and others make a distinction between the attainment of system goals and the attainment of evaluation of specific, piecemeal, or categorical goals:

> Some researchers have even proposed that the goal model of evaluation should be junked in favor of a system model. The elements of such a model are not yet clear; there are almost as many interpretations as there are participants in the discussion. But the common recognition is that organizations pursue other functions besides the achievement of official goals. They have to acquire resources, coordinate subunits, and adapt to the environment. These preoccupations get entangled with, and set limits to, attainment of program goals. According to system model proponents an evaluation that ignores them is likely to result in artificial and perhaps misleading conclusions. (Weiss 1972: 29)

The idea of comprehensiveness outlined in the Experimental Schools program announcement of March 1972 appears to be an attempt to clarify and define a system model. As explained in Chapter Three, the announcement lists six facets of an educational system which local educators who applied to the ES program were admonished to consider from beginning to end, from planning to evaluation: curriculum; staff development, community relations; the use of time, space, and facilities; administration, organization, and governance; and ongoing evaluation. These six facets cover the functional parts of a system tentatively identified by Weiss above (acquisition of resources, coordination of subunits, adaptation to environment), framing an ecological approach to educational research. The ES program was an holistic approach to educational change, by virtue of its stress on comprehensiveness and its consideration of the social ecology of education. It sought to integrate all the categories to which educators have traditionally given their greatest attention with the more systemic concerns of the total educational environment.

But more than facilitating the implementation of comprehensive educational change, the ES program planners at the national level also sought information with which to evaluate what funders are typically concerned about, namely method, theory, and utility. Weiss explains:

> The funders of evaluation research, particularly when they are outside the direct line of operations, may have an interest in adding to the pool of knowledge in the field. They may want answers less to operating questions than to questions of theory and method... Here is another purpose for evaluation--to test propositions about the utility of concepts of models of service. (1972: 14)

NIE's concern with method and theory at the program level was to be met, primarily, by an outside research team which included me as an on-site researcher in River District, while the local sites were to be more involved in evaluating the utility of Experimental Schools at the project level.

NIE's criteria for assessing the program's utility were twofold. The first related to accountability--demonstrable responsiveness of local education agencies to the ES mandate and its general goals (and at a higher level, NIE's own accountability to the Congress, the ultimate funder); and the second related to its transferability, which is one of the most unique aspects of the ES program. The 1972 announcement to which the people in River District responded speaks of transferability in these terms:

> The evaluation and documentation process will be concerned with questions which relate to local needs and goals as well as those of interest to educators throughout the country... Since the number of projects that can be funded is limited, and since what can be learned from them may be valuable for many small school districts, it is important to have these efforts thoroughly documented and evaluated. In that way, those who try new ideas, as well as those who look forward to doing so, will know what succeeds and what does not succeed in the quest for improved quality education in rural schools.

Evaluation for the Experimental Schools program, then, required attention to schooling in a comprehensive, systemic way, both to demonstrate accountability to the federal funding agency and to provide data relevant to agency concerns about transferability of the experiments, or parts of it, in the future. For River District this translated into the

need (in order to satisfy the outside funder) to plan, develop, and implement more active (and different) approaches to evaluation data gathering than they were accustomed to. Along with the larger burden of responsibility went the need for greater expertise. The prospect of implementing a more formal, rigorous system model of evaluation threatened the confortable, low-profile, informal style of previous evaluation techniques. Coupled with the apparent reluctance on the part of ES program staff in Washington to define evaluation clearly at the outset, it engendered considerable misunderstanding, confusion, and apprehension at the local level (as described below). Local administrators admitted that they did not fully understand the ES meaning of comprehensiveness, the very touchstone of systemic planning and evaluation. "While the term comprehensive is not definable," they wrote to NIE early in the project, "you must have criteria to determine if a plan is comprehensive. May we have these criteria?"

PLANNING LOCAL ES EVALUATION

From the very beginning of the ES project in River District, in 1972 and early 1973, deliberations about a structured, formal evaluation component in the project plan were frustrated by unresolved concerns over what was expected by the federal ES staff and what they really meant by evaluation in the context of Experimental Schools in River District. In telephone conversations at the time with project officers in Washington, D.C., and with a special ES evaluation consultant to NIE, the local planning director remarked that evaluation was "the area of greatest concern" in the district, and he asked repeatedly for clarification of the concept. Later, he made these observations:

> We were thoroughly confused whenever someone mentioned evaluation... The rest of the project planning was going well, but evaluation was something else.
>
> We have had little success in finding the type of assistance that we need in evaluation and, in addition, [we] are not entirely clear to what extent we should be involved in evaluation during the planning phase.

Perhaps the ES program personnel in Washington wanted to let the "experiment" work itself out in the district and thus refrained from advising local personnel how best to implement evaluation. Unfortunately, the data are insufficient to either corroborate or refute this hypothesis. At one point, however, local administrators were advised to go outside the district for help, but because they were reluctant in general to seek the advice of "experts" and "outsiders" in local affairs, River District officials avoided this approach until very late in the planning phase. When they did finally contract with a university-based evaluation expert, shortly before the plan submission deadline in 1973, it was primarily to expedite completion of the plan.[4] One of the eight chapters in the final Brown Book ES plan was devoted entirely to evaluation, and most of it had been prepared by this expert. The planning director later recalled that, "A great deal of the plan that was sent in on the evaluation portion was material that he [the evaluation expert] worked on extensively." Local officials had relatively little to do with conceptualizing or writing this evaluation component in their plan. This may explain, in part, their subsequent lack of understanding and commitment to it.[5]

For a year after submission of the River District plan, the evaluation component was virtually ignored as other concerns took precedence. The disturbing contract negotiations early in the summer of 1973 and related conflicts over project budgeting, revision of plans, workshop cancellation,

and appointment of a local director all diverted the attentions of local administrators elsewhere. Misunderstandings about contract budgeting (in particular, the allocation of only 60% of the anticipated funding amount for three, instead of the full amount for five, years) and about the intent of federal staff demands to revise the local plan, left River District officials wondering if ES staff had now retreated from their earlier commitment to comprehensiveness, and especially to evaluation, as major program goals. Locally, it seemed that if the ES staff seriously did want some sort of evaluation component implemented, they were not articulating it, or perhaps they themselves did not know the specifics. As a result, evaluation slipped into the shadow of higher priorities and other issues. One explanation of the sort of parenthetic consideration given it during the ensuing year is provided in the following excerpt from a letter, dated August 1973, addressed to the ES program director in Washington from the superintendent in River District: "To me the comprehensiveness of the project was destroyed in the contract 'negotiations' by the virtual elimination of the program evaluation component."

It was not until the spring of 1974 that evaluation again began to receive the serious attention of local administrators, as well as of federal staff members. Part of the impetus for renewed concern came from the fourth federal project officer assigned to monitor the River District project, and in part from another outside agency, the State Department of Education.

The new federal project officer was particularly concerned with educational evaluation; he had made his career out of designing and implementing evaluation programs in school districts and he considered himself an expert on the subject. His influence was certainly formative in spurring

local school officials in the direction of implementing an evaluation component in River District. He saw, however, that a major obstacle good evaluation was the difficulty of beginning so late, fully two years after project planning had begun. He, the superintendents, and the project director realized that, to achieve optimum results, evaluation for planning, development, implementation, and decision making had to be rooted in baseline pre-project data; i.e., in data that were by now virtually inaccessible. Nonetheless, the project officer noted that he had no recourse but to advise the locals to "go with their horses" (using a local idiom), to make the best of it given the lateness of the hour and other circumstances and using available outside expertise that would be acceptable by local standards. He set about immediately to explain what ES evaluation meant from his point of view, and to assist the locals in conceptualizing and implementing a passable evaluation plan within the ES project.

The second impetus to setting up a firm evaluation component came to River District via the State Department of Education. In 1969, the same year that the state legislature had mandated sweeping school district organizational reforms leading to unification, the legislature also passed a law giving every school district in the state until September 1976 to design and inaugurate a comprehensive and systematic program for planning and evaluating local educational services. The deadline for submitting the evaluation scheme was drawing near in 1974 when River District officials began to move in that direction, and, simultaneously, state education authorities were stepping up their efforts to ensure that local education agency authorities understood the intent of the law. As early as the fall of 1973, for example, a statement about accreditation and evaluation

requirements was prepared and sent to all local school districts in the state. It advised them that:

> A district may use any planning model it chooses, provided the model includes needs assessment with community involvement as the first step in the process and evaluation as the last step in the cycle. In addition, districts may elect to use the services of personnel other than State Department of Education Staff.

In River District, it was thought that the whole ES project could serve as the model, or vehicle, for meeting state requirements. Later in a 1974 State Department of Education document outlining a suggested approach for meeting the state's accreditation requirements regarding "comprehensive-systematic educational planning," the intent of the mandate was expanded:

> An effective, on-going cycle of systematic planning (needs assessment through evaluation) should allow the Local Education Agency to become accountable and to defend its level of accountability according to the extent to which agreed upon goals had been realized. Such goals must focus on learner needs.
>
> Issues related to needs assessment, systematic planning, evaluation, school accreditation, accountability, and generation of information, upon which to base future decisions, often become clouded in issues related to politics, economics, and philosophy--Local Agencies must not lose their perspective focused on the learner if they are to effectively play out their role in society. (emphasis in the original)

This latter statement concludes with guidelines to "assist local districts and planning committees in maintaining their perspective," the first of which is that, "The purpose of maintaining an educational accountability program is to improve the quality of education."

All of this made good sense to local officials, especially since it seemed reasonably attainable within the original designs of the Experimental Schools project plan.

Given these outside stimuli from both the new ES federal project officer and state officials, River District officials were moved in 1974

to begin seriously asking for whom and for what purposes evaluation data were now needed, and at the same time, without clearly demonstrating that they fully understood the answers, they began experimenting with new evaluation techniques.

FURTHER ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE LOCAL EVALUATION

Between 1974 and 1976, River District administrative officials made three major attempts to improve educational evaluation capabilities in line with federal and state requirements and local needs. The first attempt involved the implementation of a student attitude survey throughout the district. The second was the creation of the position of local project evaluator. And the third was a week-long workshop on evaluation for administrators, conducted by an outside consultant team. Each of these three endeavors is discussed below.

Student Attitude Survey

One of the fourth project officer's first suggestions to River District in early 1974 was that a student attitude survey be implemented in all classrooms district wide, under the auspices of the ES project. With the implementation of this suggestion district officials began their first attempt at improving evaluation. The project officer had in mind a particular survey he had helped to develop in another western school district which was participating in an urban/suburban form of the Experimental Schools program. The survey was designed to elicit student attitudes about schooling, and it was hoped that it would provide some of the much-needed baseline data on which to base further decisions about future evaluation and program design.

The assistant superintendent was especially attracted to the survey method of evaluation, since it was relatively inexpensive and could be easily distributed, implemented, and retrieved under the auspices of Experimental Schools. When sample copies of the suburban survey instrument arrived, the assistant superintendent made some modifications in it to fit local rural contingencies, and then had it distributed to all schools and classrooms.

Little thought was given to assuring that the survey was implemented under controlled conditions, however, and even less consideration was given to follow-up analysis and use of the results. The attitude survey was being given during the period in which the first local project director was being edged out of his job, and as a result of the attention focused upon that hassle, the completed and returned surveys lay unscored in a box gathering dust in a corner of the central project office for several months. Because of subsequent personnel changes, it was not until the following year that the surveys were scored and interpreted for local school administrators, who lacked the knowledge and incentive to do the job themselves. The candid reaction of one person trying to make sense out of the student attitude survey a year later, in 1975, was that it was "the biggest mess I've ever seen." Little forethought had been given to the value and utility of such a survey, and its administration had only created the illusion that an evaluation activity was taking place.

While the unscored student attitude survey forms were collecting dust over the summer of 1974, the position of ES project evaluator was created in River District, also at the urgings of the federal project officer.

Appointing an ES Project Evaluator

The need for an evaluator was now becoming clear; evaluation had been ineffectual to date in terms of meeting both ES and state needs, and it was hoped that by putting someone into a position of responsibility for evaluation those needs could be more conscientiously addressed. Although in the long run the highest priority was providing evidence to the state of local evaluation activity, the ES project served as the immediate testing ground for such activity.

District officials were hesitant to search extensively for an established evaluation person, but were induced instead to find someone who would fit comfortably into the district, i.e. someone who, if not a local resident, could be identified as a relative insider just the same. They were prepared to train whomever they hired in the rudiments of evaluation if need be. Their choice was a woman who had resided for many years in a neighboring school district and who had experience in teaching and counseling in another school district within the state. She was hired in time to begin work just before school opened in the fall of 1974. Her position was defined as half-time evaluator for the ES project and half-time guidance counselor for the Copperton schools.

This first ES evaluator held her job with the project for only five months, although she was allowed to continue as counselor until the end of the academic year in June 1975. Unfortunately, she became embroiled in what was described by higher administrators as a "personality clash" but which was integrally related to existing problems concerning the nature of local school leadership and activity within the administrative principalship at Copperton schools. She was described by some administrators as overbearing in her approach to evaluation and counseling, and the

duality of her role was threatening to some school personnel. As a result, her ability to function well in either capacity was undermined. In December 1975 she was released from the evaluator role and replaced by a second woman who was better known to district officials.

The second evaluator was assigned full time to the position and was given an office in Spring Creek (where she was also expected to reside), closer to the central office and to the project director with whom she was to work. In her favor as a replacement to the first evaluator, the second evaluator was a local resident (of six months), familiar with school district personnel and sensitive to district traditions and history; she had no outside affiliations (hence, no hidden agendas), but had demonstrated competence and expertise in related work, had a pleasant personality (by all accounts), and held an advanced degree in a relevant field (applied anthropology). And, although she was relatively new to the district, her qualifications and contacts with both professional educators and local residents put her in good stead throughout the district. She was, in fact, the former associate on-site researcher who had worked for six months with me and other members of the outside research team. This past experience gave her intimate knowledge of the ES project as well as of River District's educational operations.

This second evaluator was hired in January 1975 and remained at that job for 18 months, until June 1976. Although hired to replace the first evaluator and to help develop an evaluation component for the project and the district, she was officially called by a new (and neutral) term, "data consultant." This designation was intended to reduce temptations among staff to equate her with her predecessor and to reduce sensitivities about what an "evaluator" does in schools and classrooms.

The "data consultant" job description referred to three activities:

> 1. Coordinating regular district-wide evaluation activities to be determined by the Administrative Council, e.g. Achievement testing program, Attitude Testing, Community Survey, etc.
>
> 2. Serving as a resource to aid in evaluation initiated at the local level by administrators, teachers, students, etc.
>
> 3. Responding to requests for special studies initiated by the Superintendents, the School Board and the Administrative Council.

In effect, according to this description, the data consultant would evaluate nothing; rather, evaluative decisions were the responsibility of the administrative staff and trustees.

In a March 1975 report, the data consultant identified three types of information which she felt should be collected and dispersed to decision makers throughout the district. They imply some of what had been missing in evaluation so far:

> 1. Information on district programming. What are we attempting to implement in the schools? What are our goals, programs, objectives?
>
> 2. Information on student performance. What are the students learning? How well are we achieving our objectives?
>
> 3. Information on the needs of the people involved in the school system. Are job descriptions, working conditions, learning conditions adequate to meet our goals? Do district programs take into account the special characteristics of each attendance center, the attitudes of students, the interests of patrons and staff? (emphasis added)

More specifically, she listed 10 sources of information which should be systematically tapped to inform future decisions about school district operations and programming:

1. Document goals and objectives...a prerequisite to other evaluation activities...useful i. designing other data collection activities...should be reviewed on a regular basis.

2. Conduct standardized testing of students...[to] provide a measure of student performance and...identify student needs.

3. Conduct community surveys and teacher surveys...to determine student and community needs and attitudes.

4. Follow-up graduates...to determine if the education provided by the district is appropriate to their needs.

5. Follow-up new programs to determine success of program changes and needs for further revisions.

6. Conduct special studies (including cost-benefit studies) ...in order to provide additional information in problem areas.

7. Collect information on the potential growth of the district.

8. Conduct a "self-evaluation"...using local patrons to review school philosophy, programming, facilities, etc.

9. Provide more specific information on quality of teachers (and teacher candidates) to school board.

10. Revive Small Schools [ES] Committees and ask them to evaluate the program. Are those involved in the planning satisfied with the program? (emphasis added)

She also stressed the importance of good communications. "Increased communications," she wrote, "will result simply from formally collecting additional information, and reporting it to relevant decision makers." She made specific suggestions for improving communications throughout the district, including the distribution of monthly activity calendars. The distribution of school board and council minutes to teachers, the opening of more communication channels to teachers, the distribution of a regular administrative newsletter to all members of the school board, and the encouragement of student body representation at school board meetings.

Some of her suggestions about evaluation goals, data collection activities, and communications touched on controversial points such as reviving citizen committees, addressing the issue of administration-teacher relations, and encouraging more active student and patron participation in the system. Some of the suggestions were already being met, in part, although none was being addressed on a systematic or district-wide basis. In assessing the existing situation, she noted:

> Currently, evaluation in this district tends to be informal and locally initiated. This is not necessarily inappropriate. However, in areas which require centralized decision making, these decision makers (School Board, Superintendents, Administrative Council) must have access to comparable, district-wide data.

She stressed, furthermore, the need to make the district's educational goals explicit in order to construct a suitable data collection program to measure achievement of them. "The more explicit and specific the patterns of responsibility and authority, the easier it will be to implement data collection and to use the results," she wrote. She urged district officials to more clearly define the role of evaluation, and to select from the options available "a combination of formal and informal, quantitative and qualitative, centrally initiated and locally initiated data collection activities" with which to gather appropriate information to meet the needs of those involved in making decisions in River District.

Although she had only a short-term impact on some educational decisions in the district, by her own assessment the potential of the data consultant/evaluator role was less than adequately realized during her 18 months on the job. She felt that district administrators failed to appreciate her techniques or to utilize her expertise to the best advantage, and that they took little or no action based on her observations and

suggestions. She gave the district, however, the appearance of active evaluation, an appearance which was important in the district's relationships with those who would impose "another order"--the state educational officials and the NIE staff.

The data consultant had her choice of several techniques for evaluating district and project activities. One was the traditional observational approach of anthropology. More formal methods included community and pupil surveys, standardized achievement tests, various questionnaires, and structured interviews. None, however, had much long-range impact on project planning or district-wide decision making, which was one of her major goals. By her own assessment of the anthropological approach:

> ...observational research is acceptable locally only if it is not controversial or disruptive...It has been difficult to demonstrate to district administration that observational research (done by an anthropologist) deserves any more credence than their own personal observations... [it] is not likely to be widely accepted or used, unless it supports existing opinions or practices. (Richen personal communication)

And, in a paper discussing observational research for school district evaluation, she sums up the failure of the technique and the researcher's role in these terms:

> The credibility of [observational] research depends entirely on the credibility of the researcher, and most people are inclined to credit their own perceptions above those of other observers. This creates a problem for researchers who attempt to "enlighten" their research subjects.
>
> The problem is compounded when the observer is marginal to the system observed. Full participants in the system can claim better access to data, and better rapport. The marginal observer might claim a scientific detachment, or a lack of commitment to the values of his research subjects, but this may not be considered a virtue by potential users of research results.

> A research report not only contains information about the research; it also contains information about the researcher. [Our] reports implicity conveyed the information that we were not part of the system. The entire exchange emphasized [our] marginality...(Richen 1976)

Yet, ironically, even the data generated by more formal means seem to have had no greater effect on the district. The River District data consultant/evaluator has noted, for example, that:

> The data which I have provided (surveys, testing, etc.) haven't been used to plan for orderly change as I intended, (although they have been used to fulfill requirements imposed on the district by other agencies). In retrospect, I may as well have spent my time writing ethnography. It wouldn't have made much difference to the district...(Richen personal communication)

Evaluation Workshop

Local ES evaluation was, in everyone's assessment, a difficult nut to crack. The data consultant/evaluator was determined to do the best she could, however, to continue to help the district approach its goal of an effective and efficient evaluation effort. To that end, one of her last responsibilities before leaving the district in 1976 was to organize and implement a summer evaluation workshop for district administrators and counselors. In four years, since 1972, this was the third major attempt in River District to improve ES evaluation. And because the events and pronouncements of that workshop lead to certain decisions about the nature and intent of administrative efforts in evaluation, it will conclude this case study of evaluation in River District as well.

The evaluator, along with the project director and the assistant superintendent, planned and coordinated the workshop and contracted with an outside evaluation consulting team to conduct it. All administrators, including administrative principals, principals, and two head teachers, as well as all guidance counselors, the media center director, and the

district's new psychometrician, participated in the week-long event. Several Spring Creek patrons (some of whom were former teachers) and several school board members also attended some sessions of the workshop, but no classroom teachers were involved. Besides, the only other outside observer at the workshop was a representative of the State Department of Education whose presence was very important to a major aspect of the workshop--demonstrating compliance with the state's demand for a planning and evaluation scheme in River District.

The consultant team was headed by the fourth ES project officer who had recently left federal employ. It was he who, beginning in 1974, had given the greatest impetus to River District's ES evaluation efforts. He and his son now ran an educational consulting service to advise school districts and conduct workshops in evaluation. They were the only outside evaluation experts well known to district officials and with whom district personnel felt reasonably comfortable. The former project officer was highly respected and hence the most trusted of all the ES federal officials who had worked with the district in any capacity. Thus he and his son were the first outside experts to advise the district on educational evaluation on a contractual basis since the university-based expert had been hired briefly in 1973 to write the evaluation chapter of the local ES plan.

The June 1976 workshop satisfied two purposes: the need to demonstrate an ongoing effort in evaluating the ES project, which was about to enter its final two-year phase-out period; and, more importantly and more immediately, the need to demonstrate to state education officials that requirements set forth in the 1969 state law for establishing minimum standards of planning and evaluation for "accountability" in all state school systems were essentially being fulfilled by River District.

The major intent of the state law, as paraphrased early in the workshop by the state education representative, was to promote: (1) district planning with considerable community involvement that demonstrated attention to the assessment of needs; (2) development of an overall plan to meet those needs; (3) inclusion in the plan of a specific evaluation component of the district's own choosing or design; and (4) ongoing participation in evaluation related to school district accreditation. The state representative indicated his own understanding and the state agency's of the values of localism and informality in River District by emphasizing that the state's planning and evaluation requirement was "very flexible and very local...to keep as much control at the local level" as possible. This was an opportunity, he said, to avoid having such programs imposed from the top down, an opportunity which did not exist in many other states for local planning and implementation.

In response to the state mandate for an evaluation scheme, River District administrators formally submitted their program--a slightly edited, updated, retitled and rebound version of the original ES project plan, virtually the same "Brown Book" chapter which had been created in 1973. That plan conveniently fulfilled most of what was required of the district, beginning with a needs assessment with community involvement and concluding with an evaluation which addressed accountability to both local and outside needs. In its new form, however, it was the needs of the state rather than those of Experimental Schools which were being highlighted.

The evaluation workshop lasted a week, and after three years of examining project implementation in River District, the insights provided during those few days are, to me, the most important for determining the

relative success or failure of the District's ES project. Early in the week, the former project officer, now wearing the hat of a paid consultant and workshop director, presented a hard-hitting and critical assessment of district operations in regard to data collection, data processing, and decision making. He made no bones about the district administration's inability, so far, to develop a successful program. What he said was not very complimentary, although he softened the impact of his remarks by diplomatically stressing the still-existing potential for success.

Previously, the workshop director's role as project officer had once been described by a local official as that of "a cheerleader to the project, on the sidelines of the game." In his role as a paid consultant, he had turned into a tough coach pushing the players to keep on trying despite the team's low batting average. True to his role, he began with a definition of the rules of the game.

Evaluation, he began, is "a formalized system of communication... a communication network" requiring feedback from all parts of the system. He described a school system as a totality of all its parts and participants, and as a "type of bureaucracy." He stressed the totality of the system and the ease with which a total perspective can be lost. A perspective about the system as a whole is an absolute necessity for the creation of an effective communications system, he said, and its absence, he implied, immediately undermines and effectively negates any attempts at comprehensive evaluation. Within the total system, there must be a concerted attempt to tie together all levels of the staff and the administration. "There are three levels of management in an effective [educational] communications system," he said. One is the level of the classroom teachers or instructional staff, "where the action is...where

the greatest work load in terms of man hours expended occurs." The second level includes principals and administrative principals--the "mid-management staff." The third level is that of superintendents--the central office staff--with whom the greatest responsibility for encouraging and facilitating communications throughout the total system lies.

Then, with acute awareness and understanding of the underlying traditions of River District and of the fear of change which exists there, he went on to describe some of the essential needs, as well as some of the dangers involved, in operating an educational system which has to be responsive to its various constituencies. First, he noted that the school district constituents are of two orders: one is local and consists of students, community patrons, and the three levels of management noted above; the other he called, collectively, "other publics," state and federal agencies who accredit and fund the schools.

He spoke further of the nature of working in full view of all these constituencies, to whom today's educators must be prepared to respond. "One of the penalities we pay in the kind of system we work in is visibility," he said; "there is no escape, and therefore, it is best to have hard, valid data from which to discuss the issues." The need to develop an effective, responsive educational evaluation program which generates valid data is not well met by traditional modes of evaluation, he indicated. "Informal communication systems built on personal ties tend to break down [for example] when people leave."

Throughout his talk he contrasted what he called a new "data system," which is heavily reliant on good communications, impersonal and capable of operating despite personnel changes, with the old-fashioned personality-bound sort of operations. The immediate need, he stressed,

is "to identify...and build a new system." But he warned that, when new systems are being built and when "we respond to those 'other publics,'" we frequently encounter fear--"fear of what is going to happen to me, my role; fear of new data collection responsibilities I can't handle"; and ultimately, "fear...based on the fact that we are starting to make some change." But, "change occurs," he concluded, "and you [school administrators] are the 'change agents'...especially regarding the children we work with."

Having described the tradition of personal over-involvement and the fear of change as major obstacles, and eventually the acceptance of change as a crucial variable in any attempt to develop an evaluation system responsive to all constituencies involved, the consultant went on to speak of other goals that should be considered. For one, he said, River District's organization and system of governance should be redesigned to reflect "participatory management, one in which decisions eventually reflect input from a variety of people" at all levels of management and public interest, a system in which management doesn't just "filter from the top down." Top-heavy management may be "cool," as he put it, "but it doesn't have any feedback loops, no way for information to get back into the system."

He went on to delineate two factors, mutually supportive of one another, which tended to make participatory management difficult in the context of River District. One was the "monumental problem [of] geographical logistics" involved in so large a school district, and the other was the "parochialism" reflected throughout the system by "the maintenance of the independence of outlying units," i.e., of the outlying attendance areas. He acknowledged that the problem of parochialism was difficult to handle in River District, given the strong traditions of

local autonomy prior to 1972 and the recently reinforced decentralization of certain managerial responsibilities within the ES project in the spring of 1975. But, despite the parochialism within the school system, he stressed that the essential need was to develop effective communications networks tying these outlying units and the central administration together with all constituencies of the school district in an integrated system of responsible public education.

Finally, he returned to the meaning of "evaluation." It is irrelevant, he said, whether the term "evaluation" or "data collection" is used. "Evaluation is a generic term--it has different meanings to different people." There are state and federal requirements and meanings, as well as local needs and meanings, but "without systematic information flow to meet data collection needs [however defined], you have a crisis-based system--red lights..., big guns, [and] overkill!

The consultant's message was clear: as River District's project neared its end, despite the rhetoric in its formal project plan, there still remained the large job of designing and implementing a plan for systematic data collection and data processing to meet the needs of the decision makers and those who would plan and implement change in the future. In short, the hoped-for comprehensive change program to meet local needs--a better education--had not yet been realized. And formal evaluation, designed to assist the district in realizing that goal, had been stymied in River District despite so much energy and many well-intented words.

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of ES project evaluation in River District was an innovation of some concern and importance, both locally and at the federal level, but one that was difficult to achieve. If an innovation is, as Barnett defines it (1953: 7), "any thought, behavior, or thing that is new because it is qualitatively different from existing forms," then we must examine the existing forms as well as the nature of the stimulus for change in order to understand the reasons behind the failure of this innovation to be accepted in River District. It is helpful to examine three interlocking hypotheses suggested by Barnett (1953: 378ff.), namely (1) that the new idea must almost universally be perceived by potential acceptors as satisfying a want better than does some existing idea or means, (2) that certain "biographical determinants" usually exist which predispose individuals to accept substitutes for some already accustomed ideas or things, and (3) that dissatisfaction or lack of satisfaction, which often spur individuals to actively seek change, may be a pervasive attitude in some individuals who then promote the acceptance of the innovation at large.

Clearly, from the data about new methods of program evaluation presented in this chapter, (a) the local administrators and decision makers apparently did not perceive requisite changes in evaluation styles or modes as satisfying their local needs better than did their traditional ways of evaluating education; (b) nor were the principal local actors, the administrators, sufficiently motivated (either singly or as a group) by past experience to push for the integration of more sophisticated, new evaluation techniques in the district; (c) nor was there any one identifiable local leader who stood out and pushed for this (or any other)

sort of significant change over what was already happening in the school district. (It is doubtful if the board of trustees would have ever hired such a "mover" who might challenge the status quo in the district, anyway.)

In short, local school people were comfortable with the traditional, informal, and low-key style of educational evaluation they had always known, and they did not seem about to make any dramatic changes or accept any sophisticated, formal new evaluation ideas. They proceeded to work at maintaining a minimal level of evaluation activity (sometimes only on paper), in order to satisfy the fuzzy provisions of the ES contract with NIE, and indirectly the mandate of the Wyoming state board of education. Not even in the presence of such an aggressive and pragmatic advocate for change in the local system of evaluation as the last federal project officer would the River District administration make a concerted effort to implement any significant new changes in this facet of their ES project.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONSTRAINTS AND OUTCOMES

The Experimental Schools project was formally concluded in River District in June 1978. The general outline for the final disposition of the project, however, was actually prepared earlier, in 1976, in the refunding proposal (the "Contract Extension Document") for 1976-1978, written by local administrators and accepted by the federal program officials in May. During the final two years, the project retained only a small portion of its original visibility, intensity, and vitality in River District. The administrative energies which were originally expended on the planning and development of the project were refocused almost exclusively on the school district's other management problems.

This chapter addresses three topics which serve to round out this ethnographic case study of ES in River District. The first is a description and explanation of the declining interest in ES which resulted in a greatly reduced final two-year contract commitment on the part of River District. The second addresses the criteria for evaluating planned educational change of this nature, in terms of national and local goals for ES, the various perspectives from which these goals have been viewed, and River District officials' evaluation of the success of their project in 1976, on the eve of the final phase of implementation. The third task is perhaps the most important. It addresses the question: What can be learned from the experiences of federal-local relations in River District that can assist future planners and agents of change?

THE DECLINING VALUE OF ES

By the end of 1976, ES was not the high priority program in River District that it had been back in 1972 and 1973. Three things led to the declining interest and support for it: a lack of strong local commitment to its continuation, discontent and lack of trust in NIE's commitment, and declining financial incentives (see Messerschmidt, 1979).

First, throughout the project, the majority of administrators responsible for project implementation in the schools had little involvement in its inception and planning and, hence, were not highly motivated to lead its implementation. There were two exceptions to this, namely the head superintendent who helped draft the initial letter of interest in 1972 and who has remained as superintendent of the district to date, and the administrative principal (from Spring Creek) who served as temporary project planning director from October 1972 to July 1973 after the formal assistant superintendent/planning director unexpectedly left the district. No other administrative principal, or principal, or head teacher, was as closely involved in the development of the ES project plan as the Spring Creek administrative/principal. More importantly, the three key personnel who led the project through its formative implementation years, beginning in 1973, were all hired after the planning process was completed. They included the second assistant superintendent (in charge of federal projects) and the first and second project directors. Just as critically, the majority of teachers involved in classroom efforts to implement career and cultural education were poorly prepared for their tasks, primarily because the "kickoff" workshop scheduled for the summer of 1973 was cancelled. Because no other provision existed for training teachers prior to implementation, they were forced to operate for an entire year with the distinct

disadvantage of knowing very little about the goals and objectives of the project.

It is predictable, therefore, that without a strong, initial involvement in project planning and without strong central leadership to insist on and effectively cultivate support of goals from all quarters, internal commitment to the project was weak. Lack of initial involvement, combined with the strong value placed on insuring the autonomy of outlying attendance areas, each contributed to waning interest.

By 1974, ES was already being overshadowed by higher priority concerns, and by 1976, given the intervening conflicts over its direction and continued confusion over its meaning, it had taken a back seat in the educational affairs of River District. As for the administrators' viewpoint, no one took great exception to the local project director's blunt assessment in 1975 that there was simply "no program." And, viewing it from below, it came as no surprise to hear teachers quietly interpreting the malaise that was evident as a manifestation of "no leadership". Combining these two perspectives, there seemed to be both a lack of adequate attention given to, and an inability to effect the creation of, the requisite social organizational forms combining people and resources and orienting them toward specific actions and outcomes--the essential ingredients of a "program."

The second reason for a decline in strong commitment to ES was a local feeling that ES officials were no longer able to attend to their responsibilities toward the ES project sites. Apparent fluctuations of control and commitment within the Experimental Schools program in Washington during the fall and winter of 1975 and 1976 led to local perceptions of an inherent weakness in the funding agency. And the legacy

of confusion apparent within the NIE/ES bureaucracy prior to that, in the difficult years of 1973 and 1974, did nothing to enhance local confidence.

In 1976, one local project person noted three recent and distinct factors leading to local discontent and distrust of NIE--the agency's inability to honor an October 1975 deadline for a final refunding decision (it was postponed until February and not acted upon until May 1976, almost too late for effective planning for the following academic year), the resignation in 1975 of the fourth project officer and the prolonged uncertainty about his replacement (well into 1976), and rumors about changing program priorities within NIE regarding ES. These perceptions led local school officials to wonder whether ES staff persons in Washington, D.C., were any longer able to monitor the site from a position of strength. Neither the final refunding agreement nor the replacement of the project officer was completed for many months. This perception of weakness within NIE and ES in Washington, D.C., whether accurate or not, served to further weaken commitment to the project among the administrators of River District.

In retrospect, this local view of ES staff as being unable to behave appropriately and responsibly toward the sites and the projects in late 1975 and early 1976 was largely correct. Herriott (1979:70) reports, for example, that by December 1975, ES was "largely a shell of its earlier self." The morale of ES staff persons in Washington was low. Access to the sites was severely limited by travel budget cuts. At the time that local sites were requested to submit their final refunding proposals in February 1976, "most project officers lacked both the funds to visit their project sites to verify first-hand the status of the projects and the ability to moniter the projects in other ways. In constrast to earlier periods, ES/Washington was far less interested in what was taking place in these small rural school districts" (Ibid).

The third reason for declining interest in continued implementation of the ES project in River District was a monetary one. As refunding approached, local officials were frankly concerned about the relative value of ES as a financial endeavor within the overall school district budget. In total, River District administrators eventually received just over a half million dollars to plan and implement the ES project in their school system between 1972 and 1978. This figure broken down according to the phases of project development is as follows:

Planning Phase (1972-1973)	$ 46,500
Primary Implementation Phase (1973-1976)	361,351
Final Implementation Phase (1976-1978	113,091
TOTAL ES BUDGET	$ 520,942

Without question, the planning and primary implementation funds, which totaled $407,861, represented a considerable boost to the school district's budget between 1972 and 1976. But the final two-year budget was seen locally as much less important.

River District is a relatively wealthy school district by rural standards. It has enjoyed a high level of support from land and industrial taxes, especially as a result of mining industry developments and the boom conditions of its mining economy. The regular school budget for Fiscal Year 1975-76 of approximately 3.3 million dollars reflected the impacts of the mining industry growth (it had topped $5 million by 1978-79.)

The ES budget that was finally negotiated in May 1976 for the final two years of the project was $113,091. That figure was roughly divided into two-thirds for the first year (1976-77) and the remaining one-third for funding the final year (1977-78). This low level of final funding, less than half the amount anticipated in the original five-year budget proposal submitted to Washington in 1973[1] (and given inflation in the

interim) was viewed in two ways: (1) it tended to confirm local suspicions that the ES bureaucrats indeed hedged on their earlier assurances that the district would eventually receive the full funding it originally sought, and (2) it was considered to be too low to be a very significant boost to "comprehensive change" in the district.

The uncertainty about refunding in the fall and spring months of 1975-1976, plus the relatively small final funding figure, further undermined local commitments to maintain the ES project as a high priority item in district affairs. ES funds amounted to less than two percent of the anticipated school district budget for FY 1976-1977 and FY 1977-1978 combined. Thinking in purely rational economic terms, local administrators concluded that the amount of ES project funds for those two last years did not warrant their continued high level of interest and involvement.

Other pressing financial and operational problems facing the district at the time resulted from the rapidly growing population which accompanied the mining boom. This required administrators to hire staff and plan the construction of new buildings to keep pace with demands for growth. By comparison with the fiscal dimensions of school district operations at large, the ES budget allotted for the final two years was miniscule. In retrospect, this continuing non-stop expansion in River District provided local officials with an unique opportunity to incorporate into the regular school district program the ES project developments--had there been an ES project in the district! In part, this was done, however: the guidance counselors' services were incorporated quickly and easily into regular district operations. But this was accomplished with little reference to ES and could (and undoubtedly would) have been done even without the ES incentives.

The economic impacts of a project of the scope of ES in such a small rural community as River District are important. They should be noted, even stressed, but not overplayed. In the end, the economics of the situation can best be understood within the cultural context of educational decision making. By examining local perspectives, framed by traditional values, we can best appreciate the local criteria for judging the relative value and performance of such projects.

It must be asked at this point, given the declining financial value of ES and the continual headache that it was in the district, why the administrators and the trustees continued to accept the money rather than simply drop out of the ES program in 1976. The answer lies in the way people in River District traditionally do business.

For one thing, once committed to something, they do not easily give it up, despite any temporary costs. Early in the project, during the summer of 1973 when cancellation seemed imminent, local school leaders had openly vowed to "go it alone" if need be to implement the educational plan they had worked so hard to prepare. Once the project was put back on track that fall they could hardly back out simply because of periodic discouragement over certain misunderstandings and difficult times with their adversaries, the feds. In the long run, they could say with some pride that they seemingly outlasted the feds at a very difficult game.

For another, despite the small final budget, it was still a financial boost to the district's finances. In the face of continued population growth, school crowding and expansion, every little bit helped.

And finally, having heard all of the ways the administrators publicly rationalized what they were doing with the ES project as "successes," it seems to me that they firmly believed that the project had, in fact,

been useful--successful--despite the setbacks and problems. Certain parts of the project, like the career education component and the community-school activities could be pointed to as concrete examples of the administrators' and the school trustees' receptivity to patron interest and involvement. And, although the ES project did not work well as a forum for some kinds of change, it was continuously milked to the end for its utility as a catalyst for district unity.

THE CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING CHANGE

What were the criteria for evaluating change in River District? To answer this question we must examine the goals of the ES program nationally, and of the project locally.[2]

In Chapters One and Three it was stated that the overriding goal of the Experimental Schools program was to test the hypothesis that a comprehensive change effort is more likely to lead to the enduring qualitative improvement of education than is piecemeal, categorical, or incremental change. In fact, however, comprehensive educational change was more than a hypothesis. It was, itself, an essential goal of the program. Herriott has phrased it this way:

> ES was conceived as an applied research program to test the effectiveness of a "holistic" approach in which many aspects of a local educational system were to be required to undergo simultaneous change. An important assumption of ES was that the success of a holistic approach did not depend upon the development of new curricular ideas but rather upon the adoption of available innovations in conjunction with a series of structural changes to facilitate their becoming a lasting part of an educational system... To satisfy the objective of a holistic approach, any project funded by the program was expected to meet a test of "comprehensiveness"... (Herriott, 1977:106)

The criteria for comprehensive educational change were listed by the designers of the ES program as the six facets noted earlier, namely

the simultaneous improvement of curriculum; staff development; community involvement; use of time, space and facilities; the administration, organization and governance; and ongoing evaluation. Considering this ES goal of comprehensiveness, River District's planners listed their five local goals in the 1973 plan as: the implementation of career education, cultural education, community involvement, special services, and curriculum coordination and evaluation. Obviously, there were some gaps between local and federal goals.

To begin with, the plans for career and cultural education were essentially curricular in nature. Community involvement at first corresponded with the facet of community participation; later, emphasis shifted toward community education. Classes replaced committees as the locus of community involvement.

Special services, on the other hand, was designed to permit placement of guidance counselors throughout the school system. It responded, in part, to the goal of staff development, as did the various workshops planned during implementation. Curriculum coordination, as noted earlier, was essentially shelved early in the implementation phase. Evaluation, as a separate entity distinct from curriculum development, was readdressed as a major goal in 1974 and 1976.

In addition to the five goals stated in the local plan, and the sixth goal of evaluation, many informants said or implied that an underlying expectation in River District was that the ES project would facilitate a new district unity since the district, as an entity, was new. This provided the raison d'être for bringing school patrons, scattered as they were across the vast school district, together with one another and in closer communication with school officials. A measure of unity was, indeed, achieved through the ES project, but it is difficult to differentiate

that which would have accrued naturally had the program gone smoothly and relations with the federal agency always been good from that which resulted from the sort of natural alliance of mutually defensive people toward a perceived threat from the outside.

Nowhere among the stated and implicit goals of the ES project in River District is mentioned a concern for the facet of improved use of time, space, and facilities, or that of change and improvement of school administration, organization and governance, although the former was an integral part of at least two other components. For one, the use of time, space and facilities was altered in Spring Creek for the duration of the one-year ETD satellite career education programming and through ongoing use of the video tape hardware purchased through ES to allow rebroadcast of ETD programs in other schools. And, for another, expanded use of school facilities at additional times, like evenings and weekends, was an important aspect of the successful community-school programming. On the other hand, change or alteration of pre-established school district administrative structure was noticeably opposed by local officials who considered it undesirable and definitely beyond the jurisdiction of the ES program. Local reactions to attempts by the national director of ES to influence their decision about the appointment of a local project director in 1973 is a case in point (see Chapter Four).

Despite the overall program goal of comprehensiveness, then, the local project appears not to have been comprehensive at all. Nor does it appear ever to have been so intended by the locals. Even after nominally accepting it as a possibility, the idea of comprehensiveness was continually undermined in River District by misunderstandings, confusion, and conflict.

It may be inferred by non-locals, at this point, that this lack of comprehensiveness of ES in River District was "a failure." This assertion, however, is difficult to substantiate for one reason: this "experiment" in comprehensive educational change was so ill-defined that it is difficult to describe it clearly; hence clear evaluative conclusions of "failure" or "success" cannot be drawn.

Weiss characterizes two different types of programs in terms of this problem of clarity and specificity. There was, she writes, "many problems [which] have some degree of clarity [and in which] a particular method or specific materials are being employed.... At the extreme there are programs that are diffuse, highly variable, and difficult to describe" (Weiss, 1972:5). Experimental Schools fits the latter characterization.

Comprehensiveness, as the watchword of ES, was never satisfactorily defined, either nationally or locally, and the definition of its facets in the original ES program announcement was conveyed in less than one sentence for each. In announcing the ES competition, comprehensiveness was also addressed in a vague footnote which said that it was not to be interpreted simply as the breadth of the curriculum (as in a Comprehensive High School), but rather "in its broader and less technical sense meaning, including at a minimum all the significant elements of a school program." Did that mean, the locals asked, that the project was to involve <u>all</u> students, staff, administrators, and patrons, in <u>all</u> phases of planning, implementation and evaluation, in <u>all</u> parts of the educational program, at <u>all</u> schools, in <u>all</u> classrooms? Such a definition of facets and the phrase "broader and less technical sense meaning" represented remarkably unwieldy prose at best, distinctly ambiguous and obtuse. It is little wonder that, early in the project, the superintendent expressed bewilderment and asked

the federal program officer explicitly for the "real criteria" by which to judge comprehensiveness. No precise criteria were ever forthcoming, and local understanding of the term, as the goal and the hypothesis of the program, continued to be insufficient.

However, local goals and criteria for judging goal satisfaction were no better focused or more clearly expressed than those of the federal agency. The rhetoric of the 1973 plan was confusing and ambiguous. The second project director, who wrestled the most diligently with interpreting and implementing it, repeatedly expressed his bewilderment at its design and intent. Apropos of his dilemma was this message on a sign tacked to the wall above his desk:

> I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.

The effects of this lack of focus, the fuzziness of both the national and local goals for Experimental Schools, are examples of problems that have been recently discussed regarding social policy programs in general by Trevor Denton:

> Social policy programs are invariably beset by problems arising out of the following two mutually contradictory propositions: (1) the less precise the formulation of goals of a program, the more difficult it is to see if the program is achieving its goals; and (2) the more precise the formulation of goals of a program, the less consensus there will be on their acceptability. Fuzzy goals make program evaluation difficult, but seldom will there be consensus on the acceptability of clearly stated goals...
>
> In a typical program there are likely to be various different frames of reference within and between various interest groups such as researchers, the target population, the general public, the bureaucracy sponsoring the program and others... (Denton, 1975:398-399)

The case of River District's ES project could not be any more precisely stated. Quite independently, local project officials came to

much the same conclusions. In the refunding proposal written early in 1976, they wrote:

> Progress is not a concrete phenomenon. The original [ES] goals and objectives are subject to different interpretations. Assessments of success may vary according to one's perspective.

After all is said and done regarding the project, it was the locals in River District on whom ES had the most profound impact, for whom it carried the most importance as an experiment, and for whom the immediate outcomes were most significant. Therefore, an examination of the locals' own perspectives on the relative success of Experimental Schools is in order.

Local conclusions about the project in 1976 are discussed in six typewritten pages of the district's "Experimental Small Schools Refunding Proposal" dated February 11, 1976. This document, written principally by the local project director under the supervision of the assistant superintendent, presents a "General Assessment" of the project to date, and an evaluation of the project's "strengths," "mixed successes," and "weaknesses,"--the term "failures" is conspicuously absent. The assessment begins with the statement about variable perspectives, quoted above, and continues by saying that, in general, participation in the ES program:

> has been a help to the district. It has given the system the latitude to experiment, justifying and funding many changes in staffing, curriculum, etc. The comprehensive and district-wide nature of the original program has been unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons. The different socio-economic conditions, resources, staff training and local traditions throughout the district resulted in a movement by each attendance center to amend the district-wide programs to fit [its] own needs. Many teachers and administrators feel this flexibility to be a positive feature of the project.

The proposal goes on to say that the cause of difficulty in implementation was a combination of the "confusion during the first year of

implementation with NIE and the lack of funding for parts of the plan," referring here to the misunderstandings and conflict that arose over contract negotiations and funding during the crisis-filled summer of 1973.

Under a heading of "Strengths of the Project," the author of the refunding proposal indicates that the administrative principals commended the instructional materials center in Spring Creek for assistance with the curriculum aspects of the project, especially in facilitating the acquisition of career and cultural education program supplies. The guidance counseling program also was praised as a strength of the project, and, as part of the phase-in of ES project components, the district agreed to finance and direct the entire guidance program after the 1975-76 academic year.

The community education program was assessed as having:

> made great gains each year. Administrators noted that community education is not only useful to the communities but it is also an important public relations tool for the schools and district. There is strong support for expanding community education and the district is now budgeting partial support of the program.

Career education, too, "is receiving increased attention," and is being continued, while "Evaluation, in the opinion of central administration, is an emerging strength."

Under a heading of "Mixed Successes" the proposal notes that the $50 mini-projects, begun after the 1974 workshop, were considered valuable in some quarters, and that certain cultural education programs, specifically ones which brought visiting artists and poets into the classrooms, "caused mostly favorable reactions among the administrators."

Cultural Education was addressed under the heading of "Weaknesses of the Project." There it was described as "not a major need either for the students or for the community patrons." Project efforts to implement

cultural education did not appear to be completely successful. But, significantly, no mention is made of the humanities curriculum which was expanded under the rubric of cultural education during 1974 and 1975, nor of the popularity (recorded by the director in attendance figures, for example) of cultural programs. Nor is there any explanation for these omissions.

The discussion of weaknesses continues with specific problems with career education at the secondary school level.

The refunding proposal quite openly admits the problems of ambiguity of project design, lack of commitment to its goals, and concern with decentralization and local attendance-area control. Throughout the document is a detectable theme about its overall reception in the schools as a burdensome "extra:"

> In the past there has been some ambiguity in the relationship between the project and the rest of the district. In some cases, administrators do not view the project as a regular part of the district. The assignment of greater responsibility to administrative principals over project matters is intended to increase their level of involvement.

A revealing turnabout on the theme of "comprehensiveness" appears near the end of the evaluation statement in the refunding proposal, where it says that "the original plan was perhaps <u>too comprehensive</u>--attempting more than could be accomplished with available funds and staff"! (emphasis added).

In conclusion, local officials indicated their intent to focus the last two years of ES activity on only three of the five original components: evaluation, career education in the secondary schools, and community education. If there were any lingering concerns for holism or comprehensiveness, they were conspicuously absent in this document.

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE LOCALS AND THE FEDS

The problems with ES in River District were many, and they were exacerbated by the gulf which existed between the district and the federal agency. As elaborated in Chapter Three, the distances between River District and Washington, D.C. were not merely physical and temporal; they were also conceptual and cultural, and at times blatantly political. The cultural differences interest us the most here. They were exemplified by differences in value orientations, world view, social outlook, and the like, and, they were very real to those who experienced them.

The locals perceived and articulated these differences clearly when they belittled the federal bureaucrats by calling them "feds" and "Easterners," and derided certain other categories of outsiders, like environmentalists, by calling them "meddlers" and "trouble-makers." The agents of the federal government articulated them, similarly, when they conceived of rural Americans in general as "traditionalists," a term which often carries the connotation of backwardness.

As a consequence of some of the differences between the national center and the rural site, personnel of both NIE and River District had to learn to deal with each other within what was an occasionally discomfiting but potentially productive relationship of mutual aid. The federal-local relationship, as envisoned by the original ES program planners, was ostensibly designed to promote local control and local management of the individual projects, of educational improvement, while at the same time allowing for a minimum of outside monitoring and supervision. This was perceived in Washington, D.C. and locally as a fundamental departure from the typical relationships which had existed previously between federal and

local educational agencies. This new relationship, the originally conceived modus operendi of Experimental Schools, was readily accepted in River District as something with which the locals could comfortably try to live and work.

Over time, however, local personnel found a progressive change in the concept of ES as an "experiment," as federal involvement intensified. This led to a decline in rapport and eventually to open conflict. This local-federal conflict, generated primarily during the crisis months of mid-1973, only gradually changed back to a relationship of guarded rapport as new interpersonal relationships developed between the school administrators and new ES project officers.

The setting for federal-local interface in terms of the historical traditions about schooling and change that existed in River District, and in terms of a local bifurcation between "them" and "us," outsiders and insiders, has already been described. In Chapter Four, for example, we saw how different styles of advocacy and control from the outside, on the part of the federal agents of change, were differentially perceived, accepted, or rejected by the local recipients. Here I would like to focus on some practical and applied ramifications of that aspect of the total ES experience involving the intense federal presence in the local project.

Local Objectives

Involvement in the ES program was, at the start, voluntary on the part of local school administrators and trustees, based on their initial understanding of its intent and their need for what it might potentially help them achieve -- a measure of unity--in the newly consolidated school district. Once they became inextricably involved, however, two things happened. For

one, recognition of the voluntary nature of the local commitment seemed to get lost in the quest for control and compliance on the part of some federal personnel, particularly the second project officer and the national ES program director. Consequently, the issue of control, which is at root based on the idea of ownership, became paramount. Secondly, the meaning of the project seemed to change considerably as it took on the local and federal agencies' mixed flavors of imprecision and confusion. These related issues of "ownership" and "meaning" of the project bring us, in turn, back to the important questions of how federal agencies and programs are perceived locally, how this perception affects federal programs and local project performance, and what we can learn and apply to future efforts of this nature.

Homer Barnett has assessed the act of volunteering to undertake something new as a statement of proprietorship which carries with it a certain psychological load, a commitment to ownership. "When a person or a people freely espouse a course of action," he writes, "it is theirs, and this fact has important psychological consequences" (1958:190). Local officials felt committed to the ES project as their own, at least at the start. It was a pleasant surprise, the superintendent wrote just a few weeks into the planning period, "to find out that...in this project we will be able to do what we want to do, not what someone else thinks we should do." During the initial months of planning they believed this, but both their enthusiasm and sense of control and proprietorship were short-lived. They soon discovered, to their dismay and discouragement, that the project entailed considerably more control from Washington than they had previously expected, and far more than they had experienced with federal projects in the past.

Intensification of federal involvement developed shortly after ES was begun. At the time the planning grant was awarded, the administrative leaders of River District were unaware of the very active role which the federal officials would play throughout the life of the project. There seemed to be within NIE, however, a sense that the substantial expenditures on ES made it essential that federal staff exercise a responsibility and a firm hand to insure success. Consequently, ES staff, especially the project officers, found it necessary to begin playing very active roles in local planning and, in time, in the actual implementation and evaluation efforts (Herriott, 1979:65-69).

Increased federal involvement signaled an end to the initially favorable relations between the site and the funding agency. By August 1973, those relations had deteriorated into what can only be described as open hostility, coupled with considerable anxiety locally about immediate implementation of a crippled project and the prospect of future and ongoing dealings with the "feds."

A great deal of the trouble in this project can be understood best, perhaps, by looking objectively, as if from a distance, at the sort of interplay being acted out between ES at the national center and at the rural site.

Internal Colonialism

As noted in Chapters Two and Four, Wyomingites have long considered themselves to be unduly subject to powerful agents of the national government and the eastern industrial establishment. The interaction among national, state, and local educational agencies has been an especially sensitive one (Larson, 1965:570-571). The expression of these sensitivities has revolved

around the concept of colonialism (or more correctly, for this case, internal colonialism [cf. Blauner, 1972]).

The relationship is essentially one between a powerful agency at the national level, and a relatively powerless one in the rural community. A common theme which runs through the social science literature on colonialism, a theme which also characterizes the history of Wyoming, is the distinction between the control exercised at the center and the relative lack of control experienced at the periphery. Said another way, it is a distinction between the powerful in the nation's metropolises vis-à-vis the powerless in the nation's satellites, its internal colonies.

Occasionally throughout this case study I have alluded to this dichotomy of power. By looking at the relations between the locals and the feds in this light, more critically and comparatively in terms of colonialism, we may gain insight into the sort of problems that plagued the introduction and implementation of Experimental Schools, and the sort of perspective on federal education programs which lingers in places like River District.

The relationship between the national metropolitan center and the satellite societies has been defined as essentially one of "polarization and exploitative contradictions" according to André Gunder Frank (1967:9). These contradictions tend to maintain the satellite's dependence on the metropolises for survival. "The combination of these contradictions, only firmly implanted, reinforces the process of development in the increasingly dominant metropolis and underdevelopment in the ever more dependent satellites" (1967:9; see also Cockcroft, Frank, and Johnson 1972).

This dependency relationship between the hinterland and the centers of power (be it an economic, political, social structural, organizational, educational, or other) may be insidiously perpetuated by a colonialist

attitude on the part of the powerful and developed party toward the less powerful and ostensibly underdeveloped peoples. Frank and his colleagues have described the historical growth of this sort of development/ underdevelopment colonialism in these terms:

> We see underdevelopment as intimately and causally related to the pattern of evolution of developed, industrialized societies.... We consciously follow the general rule of society theory that states that when seeking to explain (or change) a part of something, in this case underdevelopment, one must look for and refer systematically to the whole, in terms of which that part can be understood (or changed).
>
> ....The processes of development and underdevelopment began when the European nations began their worldwide mercantilist and capitalist expansion. Constellations of developing metropolises and underdeveloping satellites evolved, connecting all parts of the world system from its metropolitan center in Europe, and later the United States, to the farthest outpost in the... countryside. (Cockcroft, Frank and Johnson, 1972:x-xi)

Dependency is assured, often unwittingly, by control over certain kinds of resources and access to the national bureaucratic system. Typically, there is a bureaucratic jargon, or "federalese" as it may be called, which the aspiring grantsman must master to be effective. There are "strings" and "red tape," a flurry of rules and regulations, attached to grants and contracts which make it difficult for the local director or grantsman to make strategic decisions within his own local domain. There is the "clout" of fiscal control, such as that which was exercised blatantly in the summer of 1973 in River District when the project officer withheld funding for the career workshop. There is the threat of having to "go public," which was one of the prerequisites to the award of project funds in the first place, the ES requirement of "citizen involvement." And there is intimidation, as exemplified by the behavior of both the second project officer and the national ES program director in 1973.

And, there are more covert devices, like a perpetuation of the idea that somehow "traditionalism" means "backwardness." Plans for the rural ES program (as distinct from a much larger urban ES program) were predicated on the idea that rural American education was behind that of the rest of the nation and needed an incentive to try to catch up. Local educators who applied to the ES program expressed this sort of belief about themselves, while at the same time extolling the contrasting virtues of a traditional and simpler, better way of life that is the hallmark of rural American life (Herriott, 1979:57). The rural perspective on what is the good, right, moral, and traditional way to behave and live comes smack up against urbanocentric beliefs which are often quite the opposite. Educators, like those of River District, who accept the dominant national viewpoint subsequently find themselves in a bind when, while attempting to operationalize programs and projects like ES, they run up against the unique and quite honestly parochial lifestyles, expectations, and values of their local constituent communities (cf. Cohen, 1971).

Within the classic model of colonial administration, there is a distinction between what has been called "indirect" and "direct" rule, or control. The overall style of the ES program management, as it began to develop during and immediately after the planning year, is comparable to the policy of "indirect rule." Writing from his experience with British overseas colonialism, Malinowski describes the distinction between direct and indirect rule as follows:

> The real difference between 'direct rule' and 'indirect or dependent rule' consists in the fact that direct rule assumes that you can create at one go an entirely new order....within a few years. Indirect rule, on the other hand, recognizes that no such magical rapid transformation can take place, that in reality all social development is very slow, and that it is

> infinitely preferable to achieve it by a slow and gradual change coming from within. (1929: in Clifton 1970:13-14)

I have already noted that the people of Wyoming have long considered themselves, their local governing entities, and their resources to be the unwilling objects of colonization by big government and big business in the east. They feel encapsulated by, and subordinated to, larger national entities and concerns. The analogy, therefore, between the ES program as an experiment emphasizing local involvement and the colonialists' concept of indirect rule is not as unlikely as it might at first appear.

More specifically, if we consider River District as an encapsulated educational structure in articulation with a more powerful (in the sense of controlling more resources) and larger federal educational bureaucracy, the concept of indirect rule has even more utility and explanatory power. Experimental Schools' program policy was formulated on an agreement to leave intact the fundamental integrity of the school district with provision for the district's designing and implementing a project of educational improvement that would be "comprehensive" in scope, thereby indirectly assisting in the development of local planning, managerial and evaluative skills, and expertise.[3] It was hoped that, by their own design but with exogenous financial incentives, local rural school district officials could be encouraged to develop a more creative and more responsive educational system, a better environment for public instruction and learning--in short, a better education. For federal officials to have explicitly pursued change in River District by any more direct means would have raised serious legal questions. As it was, ES personnel came

perilously close to the definition and dangers of direct rule for a brief period in 1973.

Looking more directly at the role of the encapsulated party in planned change, Barnett has characterized this sort of approach to development as "aided self-help," the key feature of which:

> is the requirement that the group of people to be served must be given the freedom to frame their definition of their needs and be granted the right to accept or reject such help as may be offered to satisfy them. (Barnett, 1958:184)

Barnett further states that the agents of change must be willing to approach assistance on request with flexibility, to act "in a permissive rather than a mandatory way" in order to acknowledge the realities of the local situation. This is the same as Gallaher's distinction between pragmatic and utopic advocacy by agents of change noted earlier (Gallaher, 1973: see above, Chapter Four). And although Barnett was writing primarily about the period when international development schemes were being designed to assist technologically underdeveloped peoples emerging from the pale of colonialism, the analogy here for heuristic purposes is not unwarranted.

Implicit in the Experimental Schools program design was the assumption that the rural school districts involved were, by their own admission, in need of upgrading, updating, and modernizing their educational systems. Unrecognized, however, was the sense of "roots" that rural people like to maintain, the cherished traditions and strongly held values that are difficult to modify or leave behind.

Earlier, I identified some of the underlying value orientation of River District culture and "way of life," and concluded, as an active participant-observer in River District, that adroitness in the local idiom, ability to comply with the local code of behavior, and a willingness

to make River District "home" were, taken together, signs that an outsider had breached the line between exoteric and esoteric wisdom.

No one expected ES project officers or other outside officials on the project (with the possible exception of me as on-site researcher) to seek to become established members of River District society or to make River District home. Nonetheless, ability to appreciate the local culture and to act appropriately within the local setting were to their advantage in establishing credentials and in working, even peripherally, with the locals. Not only would this adroitness and sensitivity have aided individual ES officers in working effectively, from within the local system, but it would have assisted in breaking down the locals' colonialist image of themselves and their project. That some ES staff members were unskilled in doing this was reflected in their inability to instill confidence and develop a comfortable working relationship with local administrators. At the height of the conflict in the fall of 1973, communications between the locals and the feds were on the verge of collapse. Under these crisis conditions, prospects of the project's ever being successfully implemented and concluded seemed dim. In time, after the critical months of the summer and fall of 1973, the new project officers worked hard to turn the image of trouble and confusion around, and to create a new and better working relationship between themselves and the locals. Despite their best efforts, however, the pains of the immediate past, coupled with local problems of economic and population growth and internal structural insecurities (brought on simultaneously by the designs of big outside business and industrial agents for mine expansion, and by the State Board of Education for school consolidation), as well as the weight of historical opinion and precedent about the nature of Wyoming's colonial state of being, the

lingering view of the national government, and of the national education agency in particular, was not altogether a positive one.

What had happened? What had gone wrong in River District? What had federal agency personnel done that was considered so serious as to be conceived of as a breach of the local system of values, an affront to local sensitivities, and a further example of local dependency and federal control? The answers have to do with culturally conditioned perceptions by both parties: there is, simply, a large gulf remaining between the cultural proclivities--what is valued--of the "feds" on the one hand, and those of the "locals," the people out in the rural American west, on the other.

CONCLUSIONS

Looking back, today's oldtimers in Wyoming reminisce about the contingencies of the natural environment, the isolation it caused and the conditions of settlement and growth which are reflected in strong local traditions about proper life style and social values. The children and grandchildren of those early pioneers look back on their predecessors, the first frontiersmen, with a certain nostalgia. Those first settlers developed the so-called "Western personality," which is described in such terms as hard-working, hard-living, honest, lonely, and friendly. Yesterday's "frontiersmen" are epitomized by today's "Westerners" who are said to be conservative idealists as well as pragmatic realists; a religious people, deeply but quietly moved by powers beyond their immediate control; a solitary as well as a collective people, men and women who keep to themselves but unhesitatingly offer helping hands when needed. They are a modest people who do not seek public acclaim; deeds of valor and endurance tend

to survive them, however, in story and legend and in the names attached to the land, the lakes, the mountains, rivers, and streams of the region.

The collective or modal western personality which has developed out of the shared hardship and isolation of the early days is still highly valued and visible today. The isolation and internal sharing have fostered an attitude of skepticism toward outside ideas and a resistance to change in both the microcosm that is the rural neighborhood and the macrocosm that is the American West.

At the local level, one result of living far from larger towns and cities has been the development of a strong sense of community among the scattered residents. This sense of close local or neighborhood identity has been repeatedly reflected, for example, in resistance to consolidation of ranch schools into districts run by townsmen--one incentive for ranchers to seek election to the school board which they currently control in River District. Here one encounters a personality type which has given rise to a parochial, conservative attitude toward such things as the use of natural resources; gun legislation; predator control; running the government, the economy and the society; and the proper role and function of "schooling" that is fundamentally different from what (it is thought) a person raised "back East" is likely to have.

All of this may sound like a great deal of myth-making and story-telling, the perpetuation of a romantic image of the land and the people of the Great American Frontier.[4] But whether factual or largely idyllic fiction, this romantic view of the West and this attitude about frontier life tend to reinforce there a political conservatism, a social parochialism, and a personal detachment from the rest of America and the world. It colors most relationships among local people, the "insiders,"

and their relationships with newcomers and advocates of change, the "outsiders." The contingencies of life in the West are on a different scale from the standards and expectations thrust upon them by Easterners. The result "has been the subjugation of the region into a hinterland status," with the concomitant development of social, political, and economic attitudes of disdain for the outside (Kraenzel, 1955).

The landscape of the West is vastly larger, the physical environment more inhospitable, and the social needs are thought to be more simple and less encumbered by established traditions and conformity than those inherited from the East. But one must also remember that conformity to Western traditions and expectations has itself become a paramount consideration in its own right out West.

The contemporary American historian, Ray Allen Billington, has, like others before him, described differences between the rural frontier West and the urban establishment East. His comments aid an understanding and appreciation for the estrangement the "locals" in River District felt from the "Eastern establishment":

> The primitive outposts that [were] planted along the frontier required fewer social, political or economic controls than the compact settlements of the East, just as the people within them found little time for cultural pursuits as they devoted their energies to subduing the [elements]...the resulting civilization differed from that of the East, its institutions modified by the strange environment, the accident of separate evolution, and the contributions of the divergent groups constituting the social order. (1967:4)

And, on a grander scale, Franz Boas, the "Father of American Anthropology," recognized early on that there were fundamental differences of culture and kind between various subsections of our vast American society:

> The industrial and economic development of modern times has brought about a differentiation within our population that has never been equaled in any primitive society. The occupations of the various parts of a modern European or American population differ enormously; so much so that in many cases it is almost impossible for people speaking the same language to understand one another when they talk about their daily work. (1977:40)

Today in River District, a certain myth about tradition, an old-fashioned stability, individualism and freedom, and a basic uniqueness from the rest of the country still persists. The fear of its demise at the hands of various groups of "outsiders" who espouse "progress" is widespread among many, although by no means all, of its residents. Perhaps more than ever before, an understanding of local history is today critically important in order to achieve a sense of perspective about the rural West and to maintain a local identity.

Without question, historical events in River District have played an integral part in the heritage of the Great American West and its frontier life. The local people are proud of that involvement, and their cultural history helps legitimize contemporary rural ethos, values, and world view.

Modern life in River District is, in many ways, a continuation of the past; the present culture, contemporary values, and local attitudes toward education and many other aspects of life and society are affected by the past but are equally tempered and often reinforced by conditions of the present and concerns for the future. This is still a "frontier" in the minds of many, still new and challenging, but the local, contemporary "frontiersman" feels a foreboding for what the future may bring. This land still attracts people seeking a fresh start in their personal lives and new opportunities for corporate business investment. But the changes which accompany the dreams are often perceived as disruptive of the status quo:

the arrival of new and different people and the development of land and natural resources are especially disconcerting prospects to many long-term local residents.

There is a bitterness in River District reflected in the fear of change imposed by "forces (as they are called in River District)[5] beyond local control; i.e., big business, big government, national priorities and dilemmas and global crises. It is a fear of the loss of tradition and sense of community, two amorphous but nonetheless highly valued and very real concepts in the minds of people in small-town, rural America. It is a fear of the loss of the "frontier" to outsiders who covet its resources (but do not appreciate the ethos of its inhabitants) and who want to impose progress in its stead. Above all, it is a fear of the loss of control over local institutions like the schools. As Corwin has put it:

> This was once a rural nation which continues to jealously guard the autonomy of its local institutions in the face of prevailing nationalizing influences, including: the mass media, residential mobility, and regional disparities in wealth and in social problems. Noting that authority for education in this country has traditionally resided in the states and local school boards, the critics charge that federal regulation has increased disproportionately to the federal dollars received. (Corwin, 1977:2)

The same point is reinforced in a recent comment by Cronin:

> Most of the signs point to an increasingly centralized system of national education policy. This trend may, in fact, increase certain kinds of education opportunity while diminishing the traditional options of local and state governments. The junior partner is taking over the firm through sheer aggressiveness, while the senior partners fret about additional paperwork but graciously accept the extra income. (Cronin, 1976:501)

There is nothing new in all this; the people on the frontier, even back in the 19th century, perceived many of the same threats. The first settlers and their descendants harbored the same suspicions of outsiders, especially the representatives of government and business, while at the same

time they relied greatly on those outsiders to keep local economies and the social order strong (Pomeroy 1955, Kraenzel 1955).

Part of the answer to the question of how to generalize from the lessons learned in River District, then, is found in the discontinuous themes which have emerged, intertwined, throughout the case study, which deal with the problems of "district unity" and "local control," and with the problems of introducing and pursuing change from a "cultural distance" by agents of the federal bureaucracy.

The quest for "district unity" arose amidst the diversity of River District's geography, demography, economy, and educational system. Many factors created the diversity, among them: the size and nature of the natural environment; a history of sparse and isolated settlement; economic busts and booms; the concomitant repulsion and attraction of various categories of outsiders and newcomers; and the formerly fragmented and autonomous nature of rural public education. And not the least among the factors was a set of traditionally strong values and opinions about the appropriate behavior of selves and others among those who call River District "home." Cognizant of all this, local school administrators and others hoped that participation in the ES program would somehow help to at least knit together the multifarious school patrons and programs around a common cause, to help weld the educational diversity together with a singularity of purpose and a coordination of effort. In this quest, they were partially successful.

The long-cherished quest for "local control," another theme was expressed in River District in two ways. On the one hand, it had an internal referent. In this context the issue was: Who manages the schools and externally funded projects like ES?--the central administrators (superintendents and project directors in Spring Creek) or the attendance area

managers (the administrative principals)? Despite the rhetoric of unity and coordination of effort, the history of autonomy among the outlying schools prior to reorganization and consolidation in 1972 made intra-district unification and coordination extremely difficult. Tradition appears to have been the stronger force here.

On the other hand, local control also had an external referent in the long-standing issue about the nature, scope, intent, and intensity of outside (state and federal) government involvement in local educational affairs. This was the issue around which much of the concern, confusion, and frustration existed in relations between the "locals" and the "feds," as it was often expressed. In contending with divergent opinions and options, both local and federal officials somehow balanced conflict with accommodation and managed to keep the ES project on track, even though it often appeared to be stalled.

And finally, this entire case study is an attempt to elucidate some of the issues and problems common to the introduction of change at a "cultural distance." The applied anthropologist H. G. Barnett wrote the following observations after reviewing in 1976 some of the case study material from Project Rural specific to River District. The problems of culture change encountered in River District are a "common occurence," he began.

> Even assuming that the Washington planners of ES anticipated regional differences in its comprehension and implementation, they could be enlightened with respect to why and how. They might also take comfort with the assurance that some degree of "conflict and accommodation" must be expected when such programs are initiated at the cultural distance. (personal communication; emphasis added)

Studies of culture change around the world are not new, but their adaptation to the problems of change in complex American society appears,

after many years, to be still somewhat novel. Some anthropologists, among them Morris Opler, John Provinse, Solon Kimball, and Laura Thompson, were already examining problems of government programs and their administration, for example, as early as the 1930's. At the same time, others were beginning to adapt, with considerable success, some of the traditional methods of anthropological study first tested in exotic foreign settings to the Middletowns, Yankee Cities, Plainvilles, and Street Corner Societies of America. And still others were merging the anthropological perspective with a more sociological approach to American industry (see Arensberg, 1978, Eddy and Partridge, 1978b).

In the past half century, a body of important literature about the cultures of complex organizations, communities, and government bureaucracies and about the vagaries of induced socio-cultural change (both at home and abroad, but especially in colonial situations) has grown immensely (Eddy and Partridge, 1978a, Messerschmidt, n.d.). Yet, despite a strong undercurrent of interest in the application of anthropological insights to human problems, applied anthropology has long suffered as a "second-rate, wretched sub-field of anthropology," generally classed as "untouchable" by others both within and outside of the profession (Rogers, 1975:347-348). Consequently, both the methods and the message of this sort of research need considerably more attention.

The study of historic and contemporary cultural differences--of differences in opinion and judgment between the eastern and western United States, between the urbanized metropolis and the rural satellite--allows us a unique opportunity to understand the context into which the Experimental Schools program was introduced in River District. It is a necessary first step toward preparing the way for more reasoned, sensitive, and locally acceptable programs of federally facilitated educational change.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE RESEARCHER "AT HOME" IN RIVER DISTRICT: A METHODOLOGICAL POSTCRIPT[1]

I completed my fieldwork in River District in September 1976. A little over a year later, a colleague burst into my university office clutching a journal. "I didn't know you'd been thrown off your research site in Wyoming!", he exclaimed.

Quite honestly, I hadn't known it either.

I glanced at the passage in the article referring to my predicament: "There have been no resignations [in Project Rural]," it began, "Although in one case it was agreed to accept a field worker's request to relocate temporarily away from the site in order to reduce tensions which were developing between him and the superintendent[s]." And, a few paragraphs later it said that as tensions and misunderstandings mounted, "they [the superintentendents] declared our field worker 'persona non grata' and caused him to leave the field after only two years" (Herriott 1977: 109, 111).

The author of this account, Robert E. Herriott, wrote from intimate experience with the research in Experimental Schools, as the director of Abt Associates' "Project Rural," the project on which I had been employed since August 1973. Some of Herriott's perspectives on River District and on the problems of conducting research on its ES project are in certain respects different from my own, especially the hows and whys of my leaving the site. Although there is no question that I encountered serious problems in conducting the research, that I was, in a sense, "closed out" of some categories and sources of data, and that I did leave (temporarily) in 1975, partly to avoid local tensions about my presence as a researcher, nonetheless, I never felt "caused to leave" nor forcibly

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driven away from the site.[2] In fact, I left River District permanently only in 1976, three years after the research had begun. My departure was approximately at the same time as that of the ten other on-site researchers in Project Rural from their sites.

The superintendents in River District would be chagrined to read an account of my having been "forced" to leave. For several months in 1974 and 1975, I was not made to feel particularly comfortable or overwhelmingly welcome in my efforts to fulfill the requirements of my research on site. But, knowing now what I do about their own problems of dealing with a troublesome and powerful federal bureaucracy, I think that, had I been in their position, I would probably have reacted with similar distrust toward any outside researcher who appeared even remotely to be beholden to the officers of that very same bureaucracy.

The problems I encountered in conducting my research in River District cannot be dismissed simply as an instance of one researcher's being "thrown off" the site. Rather, they are more fruitfully seen as part of two other issues--first, as a logical and predictable reflection of the school district's own problems and perceptions with all categories of outsiders, and second, as a reflection of the nature and limits of applied social science inquiry in American communities generally.

The limits placed on my research in River District are, I am convinced, simply examples of the kinds of limitations that persons in positions of power--whether in government agencies, legislative bodies, research firms, local school districts, or other agencies or organizations, for example--can and frequently do impose on applied social scientists who are "contracted up" or otherwise subject to higher authority or whim. The impositions which I encountered, both endogenous and exogenous to the

research site, often constrained my freedom of inquiry and threatened to compromise the content and design of the research products.

Rarely in the anthropological literature does one find the author's description in any detail of the conditions of his or her research endeavor. He or she may be excused, perhaps, in instances where the researcher's presence clearly has little observable effect on the human subjects or on the data being obtained. Such instances may have occurred in early studies of "primitive" or preliterate peoples (such as Brian Hodgson in the Himalayas in the early 1800's or A.R. Radcliffe-Brown in the Andaman Islands in the early 1900's),[3] but I doubt if today any anthropologists can claim to have no effect on his subjects or his data. Anthropologists from the "modern world" now universally represent an aspect of change in any society, at any place on the continuum of modernity, simply by their presence. In this instance, my presence and the various roles and methods of my research in the modern context of rural Wyoming had considerable effect on local events. I was there to fulfill part of the conditions of the contract between River District and the National Institute of Education, as part of a mandated research component built into the ES program. When I was first assigned to River District I was admonished to conduct summative evaluation research, as if through a one-way glass, with as little formative impact on the situation as possible.[4] By pursuing summative research we were, in effect, withholding all evaluative judgment--in fact, all information about the progress of the project--until the end of the research period. Formative research, on the other hand, implies a continual flow of information, or feedback, to the project about its progress. The latter would have undermined the experimental basis for the ES program; hence it was to be avoided at all costs.

It is clear, however, that my presence as a researcher did impact the data and the local project, changing them and certainly changing me and my perspective on applied research in my own society as a consequence. Hence, in this concluding chapter I wish to describe my place, both inside and outside of River District, in order to help others more fully appreciate the context of my research and the troubles that can be encountered in this sort of endeavor. In a very real sense, this entire study can be viewed as an encounter between myself as a researcher and myself as a member of the society under study, a part of my own society. I am reminded here of the comments of M.N. Srinivas describing his thoughts on doing research in India, also an encounter with the self as a native researcher:

> I shall now consider briefly some methodological issues which stem out of the study of one's own society... In order to do this I shall have to refer to myself and my work, and embarrassing as this is I hope that the experience will clarify for me, and perhaps for others also, certain problems which anyone engaged in the study of his own society has to face. It may also induce some of my colleagues to make a similar effort so that the net result might be greater objectivity in the work we are engaged in. (Srinivas 1966: 147)

It is with considerable humility and the wisdom of hindsight that I now address the ups and downs of applied research in River District. My analysis begins with a brief comment on methodology and research technique, and then moves on to discuss researcher roles and rapport and the issues which made research in River District both interesting and difficult.

METHODOLOGY: TECHNIQUE AND STRATEGY

Methodology embraces the whole conduct of social science inquiry, the overall stragegy, the process, the "general philosophical principals" of research (Kaplan 1964: 23). Specific methods, on the other hand, are

the particular techniques, the tools and the various steps taken to accomplish a piece of resaerch. Kaplan has defined "methods" to include "such procedures as forming concepts and hypotheses, making observations and measurements, performing experiments, building models and theories, providing explanations, and making predictions" (ibid., p.23); in short, that which must be done in order to make the necessary preparations, gather the data, analyze them, and draw conclusions.

My specific methods of inquiry were drawn directly from traditional anthropology; they were neither complex nor esoteric. They included variations on participant-observation, unstructured interviews, some reliance on secondary sources (such as school district files, historical society records, several scholarly studies of the region, and newspaper accounts), and comparison of my data and insights about River District with other rural community studies and various studies of educational and social change. The approach was entirely inductive, and working hypotheses were generated as the data were collected. Its analog in sociological research has been referred to as "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Smith and Pohland 1977).

Participant-observation has long been a standard tool of inquiry in anthropology. It is a qualitative orientation and assumes that there is value in analyzing human behavior by active participation in the life of the observed, and by the type of introspection that results. It is the method of <u>verstehen</u>, or "understanding," as described by the German sociologist Max Weber (1947; see also Abel 1948: 211-218).

Ray Rist pinpoints the underlying assumptions of participant-observation in these terms:

> Emphasis is placed upon the ability of the researcher to "take the role of the other;" to grasp the basic underlying assumptions of behavior through understanding the "definition of the situation" from the view of the participants; and upon the need to understand the perceptions and values given to symbols as they are manipulated by man. Qualitative research is predicated upon the assumption that this method of "inner understanding" enables a comprehension of human behavior in greater depth than is possible from the study of surface behavior, the focus of quantitative methodologies. (1976: 10)

Depending upon the situation, I participated and observed in various ways. Sometimes I played the role of the purely unobtrusive observer, sitting around, loitering, and "lurking" a lot in school offices, for example, much as anthropologists do as a matter of course.[5] Sometimes I observed events in the school district quite openly and somewhat obtrusively. For example, I sat in on administrative council meetings for as long as I was welcome, I attended school board meetings and ES committee meetings regularly, I was present for most of the meetings between local school staff and ES project officers when they visited, and I participated in or observed various town and county meetings dealing with governance of the hospital, the fair, and other public institutions and issues. At still other times I took an active role as, for example, a community member of the district's cultural education committee, a member of the community chorus (which my wife organized and directed in Spring Creek), as a visitor in several Protestant and Catholic churches and at their functions, and as one who experienced the week-long annual Ranchers' Family Camp Meeting in the mountains above Copperton (where full participation was expected and unavoidable). This combination of settings, memberships and experiences provided me with good data on the community at large, and on the specific "cultures" of power, schooling, hobbies, and religion in River District, as well as comparative data with which to analyze many other local "cultural scenes" (Spradley and McCurdy 1972) which go into making up the whole

community. In these instances, I quietly but openly took notes and often followed up particularly cogent points by later interviewing selected participants.

Besides participation and observation, I also engaged informants in interviews, both structured and unstructured. In the structured situations, I stuck to an interview schedule held either in my hands or in my head, and made appointments to meet and talk about specific topics with particular individuals. Some of these interviews were taped, and the transcripts returned to the informants for correction or amendment (or deletion) later. (No one, however, ever chose to make any changes.) More often, interviews were unstructured; I would ask questions about a variety of topics, sometimes from the structured schedules I made up, but unannounced in advance. Unstructured interviews frequently took place over coffee in the central school district office, during breaks in formal meetings, in faculty lounges, at parties, and in the homes of key school district personnel and other townspeople where I, often with my wife, was an occasional guest.

Finally, I recall spending many hours leafing through back issues of the Spring Creek newspaper, the school district files, and the records of the Spring County Historical Society. And I sometimes drove hundreds of miles to peruse the files and collection on the history and culture of Spring County at the state university in Laramie and at the state archives and library at the capital in Cheyenne.

There is nothing particularly novel about these methods; they are quite typical of the anthropological enterprise, an enterprise that was developed for the most part in non-western communities far from River District. In time, however, I began to realize that some of my methods did not seem to fit the unique situation which I was encountering as a

researcher in his own society. Some of my seemingly innocuous inquiries, like access to the files, took on the air of "investigation" and "interference," particularly after local perceptions about the bounds of privacy were sharpened in 1974. As local sensitivities about outside research peaked during the controversy over passage of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 by the Congress (explained in detail below), my study appeared to my school district administrator-hosts to more and more breach the traditional bureaucratic secrecy of the educational institution and its administration. My presence became disruptive in the school district, especially (actually, almost exclusively) in the "central office" of the superintendents in Spring Creek.

Specific research techniques were not the issue in River District (although some were occasionally questioned by informants for whom they were new or novel). At issue, instead, was my role(s), how I fit in locally, on the one hand, and the meaning and implications of this form of mandated research (integrally tied to ES funding) on the other.

The sociologist Homans has noted that, "People who write about methodology often forget that it is a matter of strategy not of morals. There are neither good nor bad methods but only methods that are more or less effective under particular circumstances in reaching objectives on the way to a distant goal" (1949:330). Unfortunately, the particular circumstances of my research changed dramatically during the course of inquiry, and both its immediate objectives and the more "distant goal" took on new dimensions and new directions well before my fieldwork was over. Under these circumstances, some questions of morality--of ethics, really--did arise, but in the long run, the central issues were the very nature of social inquiry in River District as part of a federal program and,

ultimately, both the limits to which this sort of applied inquiry could be taken and the most suitable strategies and the best roles to adopt under changing and often capricious conditions.

ROLES AND RAPPORT

I approached River District that first day (in July 1973) with great caution, on the advice of Ron Estes (one of the first on-site researchers employed in Project Rural) and Robert Herriott (the project director). Estes and Herriott (1972) warned in an early statement on researcher role that:

> the field researcher is one who is injected into an existing social system, [who] will assume a social role within that system, and will at the same time maintain a social role within a research organization, as well as a position within the community of scholars of his academic field. The complexity of this role set, as well as the great potential for role conflict implicit in its composition, dictate that the conduct of the role be approached rationally and with extreme care.

"So this is River District?", I thought as I drove into Spring Creek. ("So this is our researcher!", the silent faces might have said if they had known who I was.)

Enter the researcher, a "Westerner" by birth and inclination. My westerness, specifically my upbringing on the "Last Frontier" of predominantly rural Alaska, was played up during initial introductions in the school district central office. The assistant superintendent remarked during our first meeting that being from Alaska was a definite asset for life in Wyoming. There was a clear implication of shared values and attitudes about politics, daily living, hunting, the outdoors, and the like, a connotation that "Easterners," in contrast with Westerners (especially us rural Westerners), did not fit in and were somehow suspect.

I was asked about my university training and professional inclinations next.

"You're a what?", the superintendent asked incredulously. "An anthropologist?" Then, after a pause to reflect, he added: "Oh, you look for arrowheads and dead Indians."[6] At which time I introduced myself as an ethnographer with a penchant for studying contemporary society and culture in communities of living peoples.[7]

So, enter then the social scientist seemingly steeped in the study of foreign and exotic societies, of secret cults and trading rings and incomprehensible kinship systems, armed with cigarettes, candy, and condoms for the natives, and a naive empathy for their plight...

"What exactly will you be doing, as an anthropologist, in River District?", I was asked...

"Will you come and show slides from your travels at our Republican Ladies' Meeting next week?", I was asked a few days later by a local rancher's wife. I did, and got some of my best insights into some very conservative and rather provincial local political sentiments.

Enter a certain "mystique" about anthropology and anthropologists (Braroe and Hicks 1967)..., the romantic adventurer, the traveler of the world, the "teller of myths" (Richardson 1975).

Enter a style and a method of research unheard of, much less appreciated, by those who administered this school district--participation, observation, interviews, and, the ever-present ear--a penchant for hanging around talking and listening in hopes of detecting someone's real feelings about an issue, as opposed to what is said publicly or written in plans and reports.[8] Such listening and loitering seemed, to some, to be mere

"loafing." Much later, near the low ebb of my relationship with the school officials in River District, the superintendent bluntly called this style "eavesdropping!"[9]

How many times I was called the "evaluator," because the contract dubbed all of the outside research effort as "evaluation." Educators, especially administrators, seem to have a passion for evaluation, but when they see themsleves being evaluated it begins to take on unmistakably negative connotations. Nervous administrators and insecure project directors, just as untenured teachers, all fear "being evaluated," to one degree or another.[10] Fear of evaluation among teachers was expressed to me on several occasions throughout the research, and because by study kept me in such close contact with the school administrators who hired and fired teachers, I sometimes deliberately avoided visiting certain classrooms in order to save a fretful teacher the embarrassment of my suspect presence. (I never evaluated any school employee for any purpose, of course.)

And how many times I was called "the observer," with an unmistakable connotation of "spy." It was a standing joke, of sorts, among one area administrative principal that I was always dubbed "federal agent ME-109," linking my surname with the famous German fighter plane, the Messerschmitt-109 of World War II.

Some discomfort on the part of River District administrators with my role as observer was subtly apparent on an occasion when I accompanied several of them to a state educators' conference in Cheyenne. During a party after the meetings, the new assistant superintendent introduced me to some of his colleagues and friends from other school districts around the state. He began his introduction with a story about

a confidence man who arrived in town posing as a stucko repairman. As the story goes, the repairman eventually skipped town, pocketing payment for work he never completed, leaving behind him the typically disgruntled victims, the so-called "stuckees."

"Don is our observer," the assistant superintendent concluded, "and we are his observees." Everyone laughed. The story was pun, not prophecy, and as far as I know the assistant superintendent had no intentions of casting aspersions on me as any sort of swindler.

At one time later in the research, during the nadir of my rapport in River District, I was called a "journalist" and equated with an especially unpopular investigative reporter on the county newspaper in another town. At the same time my work was branded "sensationalism" and "melodrama" and my facts as "distorted" and "out of context" by the superintendents who read one of my reports. At one point I was led to believe by the superintendent that I, or Abt Associates for whom I worked, or ultimately NIE for whom the research was being conducted, would be sued for libel if I published certain notions about the local project (some of which became integral to my case study and are presented in Chapter Five). The threat never got beyond polite but pointed suggestion, although my superiors at Abt Associates' headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts, considered it serious enough to consult corporate lawyers for advice.

Enter too, a family man, property owner (we bought a house during the first year there), a voter and taxpayer, but most of all a newcomer who somewhow, with this plethora of roles and statutes on his head, had to settle down in the community and try to gracefully thread the needle of acceptance in a small town and to exist comfortably with some of his key informants as neighbors. At times my wife and I felt like we were living

in a goldfish bowl--everybody knew who we were and some had interesting suspicions and speculations about my "real" occupation(s). (Some never did fully understand or believe the nature of my research role and my affiliation with Abt Associates under a contract between it and the federal government.) We, in turn, were the strangers who had to get to know each identity, each person, power, and status in town, one by one.

At a holiday party for school administrators, to which we were invited, the topic of the town water supply came up. Our daughter had recently been ill and a doctor had suggested that we boil her drinking water. When I questioned the quality of the local water and the erratic functioning of the town's chlorinating system during a party conversation, I was abruptly interrupted and loudly admonished: "If you talk about our 'bad' water system like that, Don, how do we know what you'll say 'bad' about our school system? You're a 'scientist,' Don; where's your facts?"

Enter, finally, the professional anthropologist, who must keep up in his field, who writes and publishes and flies here and there to give symposia papers and pass his Ph.D. orals, in order to ensure his employability after the years of rural and academic isolation on this project are over.

A rancher on the school board, a gentleman whom I saw only infrequently, once asked quite seriously: "How can you do your job here, Don, when you are away at meetings all the time?" It was a small community, so word of my travels got around.

Mostly at first, however, people were just curious. They took their slow, measured time to check us out. For the townspeople it wasn't so much my credentials as a researcher, as it was ours as a family, which interested them--whether or not I as an individual and we as a family

were "okay." Other researchers have reported similar experiences--that it is not what you do, but whether or not you are "okay" as a person that counts.[11]

Overall, we fared well in our initial encounter with River District. We talked about my research straightforwardly, about who I was (and who we were as a family), what I expected to accomplish, to whom I was responsible (to myself, to my local informants, to the research firm, to the government agency--in something like that order), and how I expected that getting to know the people of River District would be a pleasurable experience. And the first year of rapport building and maintenance went well--a "honeymoon" phase marked by excellent "observer/observee" relationships. It was a year of many roles tried and tested and generally accepted or accommodated by the locals, and by myself.

Nevertheless, virtually every newcomer is an outsider in River District. Historical and family ties to the settling of this region a century ago, long-term residence, and the acceptance and overt display of the local ethos and world view (in dress, speech, and manners, for examples) are essential criteria for judging whether an individual belongs or not. I remember interviewing a businessman whom I assumed was an "oldtimer" in the area who, responding to a question about the past, said: "Why d'ya ask me? Somebody else, like old Bert and Vera, would know better. They've been here since the turn of the century. I've only lived here twelve years, m'self--I'm just a newcomer!" Then what was I, a resident of barely twelve months?

My amorphous role as "government researcher" caused consternation and misunderstanding and some mild contempt among the hard-working ranchers of the region. I recall an especially outspoken but not unrepresentative

rancher who was generally critical of what he and others perceived to be government boondoggles and misappropriations of taxpayers' money. Half seriously, half jokingly, he made a remark once, something to the effect that "it must be nice, Don--your job is like a paid vacation."

My defense of the research role was less than convincing to men and women such as he who were contemptuous of soft, white collar, pencil-pushing jobs of contemplation (as mine apparently appeared to be). Next to bureaucrats and eastern politicians (western ones were usually considered to be more credible), researchers did not rank high in local esteem. There was less concern in school circles about my role, of course, given that research is a national educational priority, has credibility in education, and in this instance was a precondition for receiving federal monies for the local ES project.

In the context of my most concerted research focus, the schools and the administrative center of district operations, I was perceived as an honest person and, for the first year at least, as a friend of the system. Administrative meetings, office files, and many private conversations were generously opened to me. I was assured on many occasions that nothing I observed or documented could conceivably harm the project, the district, or its officers and personnel. "We have nothing to hide," I was told by the school board chairman and the superintendent when we discussed my contractual relationships with the research firm and the funding agency. I believed them, and they had confidence in me.

But, in the fall of 1974, a year into the research (two years after project planning had begun), two outside factors suddenly disturbed local research efforts and project development, seriously challenging the potential success of both. This happened at a time when the newly unified

school district, now two years old, was beginning to coalesce into a well-functioning system; when local school administrators seemed at last to be sorting out their own new internal role relationships; when the ES project, after a year of serious setbacks, was entering a second, more promising year of implementation. The year before had seen considerable local and NIE staff turnover; the important ES career education workshop had been cancelled, and for several critical weeks the heated telephone confrontations between federal and local officials were almost daily events. Ultimately, as was seen in Chapter Five, accommodations were made and the locals decided to implement a limited project rather than go with the entire plan as they had anticipated. Now, with these problems mostly behind them, locals and federal officials alike anticipated a more stable phase of project development in River District for the next two to four years.

The fall of 1974 was also a time when research activity was being stepped up. A year of rapport building was behind, trust and neutrality had been fairly well established between me and local informants, and a more intense documentation effort was now beginning. Partly because of my own growing needs in so diverse and large a school district, and partly because of an increased work load imposed by other members of the research team at Abt Associates' headquarters, I employed an associate on-site researcher to work with me for six months to complete a site history (Messerschmidt and Richen 1975), to prepare parts of the case study, and to help in the time-consuming collection of individual academic records on all students in the district for a comprehensive pupil change study (see Abt, Cerva and Marx 1978).

The exogenous factors which upset our best intentions were the sudden passage in the Congress of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 and a simultaneous and significant shift in the groundrules governing the conduct and products of ES research on site. The first of these, the so-called "Buckley Amendment" to the Omnibus Education Bill, challenged many traditional assumptions about the undisturbed operations of local educational agencies and raised the issue of individual "privacy" to new heights across the nation. The second factor, imposed by officials at NIE, undermined the good rapport and relative neutrality which on-site researchers throughout Project Rural had been striving so long and hard to build and maintain.

In River District, each of these factors had profound effects on the behavior of local administrators toward the outside research, and on the maintenance of my research role relationships with them as kay informants. And, as these two factors coalesced and blurred into one, reinforced and compounded by the legacy of the Watergate scandal which had engendered a pervasive climate of suspicion toward government, the issues of invasion of individual privacy and of its correlate, bureaucratic secrecy, became the local catalyst for imposing limits on the outside research effort--on me.

Suddenly, my freedom to study the school administration and the culture of power was challenged and quietly, insidiously, contested. I found it increasingly difficult to observe and document project activities or to weave together the various strands of the case study. Access to important file documents was now denied me, administrative meetings were closed to my participation or observation, and informants within the school system were now discouraged from talking with me. Questions of my "rights" to

other data and documents were raised. In a matter of weeks, a rhetoric of "us" versus "them" emerged and a seemingly insurmountable barrier was erected between the "insiders"--defensive officials in the district's central and area offices--and "outsiders," me in particular, and my associate researcher. I was still greeted cordially in unofficial and neighborly contexts, partly, I suspected, to maintain an abiding public facade of unanimity and consensus in all school district affairs. But when I formally sought data on the project or other district operations, I was met with polite but firm reubffs and a distinct coolness. Thus, the rapport between us had seriously deteriorated.

THE ISSUES OF MY UNDOING

The nature of the two exogenous factors that contributed to these negative reactions needs further discussion, both in terms of their genesis independent of River District and of their conjunction with and impact on events on site in 1974. It is precisely these kinds of problems, generated by local reactions to events, which are often beyond the control of local informants or researchers alike, which can rapidly undermine even the best of research intentions and the most carefully developed rapport between researcher and informants.

Powdermaker (1939, 1966), for example, had to be extremely cautious in her study of Black people in a racially mixed southern community where the rules of conduct, by which Whites such as she could mingle with Blacks, were imposed by the larger society beyond local control. More recently Diamond's (1964) fieldwork in a Nigerian community was undermined when political events and intersocietal animosities negated much of the personal rapport he had sought to build, as well as his overall research efforts.

Closer to home, on a midwestern Project Rural research site, William Donnelly (personal communication) encountered similar troubles when an unexpected issue, essentially unrelated to the project, destroyed his rapport with certain key informants. Despite his neutrality in local school politics and largely because of his close relationship with school teachers, when the teachers went out on strike, the administrators with whom he had also cultivated good rapport, unilaterally and summarily cut him off from the important data they possessed. Serber (n.d.) in his study of state insurance commissions in the United States, and MacLennan (n.d.) in her study of class formation and conflict within the Hawaiian sugar industry, also report similar disruptive intrusions on the research caused by political events quite removed from the research problems which they were purusuing. In both cases, they were forced to reconsider and reorder their methodological strategies and role relationships in order to complete the research tasks.

My own situation is best summed up in Diamond's observation of his predicament in Nigeria: "I was, then, journeying to an area that was ethnographically important, which I knew, and politically explosive, which I didn't know" (1964: 123).

The Buckley Amendment

In September 1974, the Buckley Amendment, which deals with the privacy rights of parents and students, was signed into law by President Ford; it became effective on November 19th. This law aroused unexpected apprehensions about its intent and its potential impacts on the normal operations of local educational agencies nationwide. It stated, in part, that federal funding would be withdrawn or withheld from educational

agencies or institutions which had a policy of denying or otherwise preventing parents, students over 18 years of age, and school alumni access to pupil records (Section 438).

At first glance, the law seemed innocuous and fair enough, of little threat to local educators, and certainly no problem for me, doing research on a federal project. It was a law ostensibly written and passed in the public interest. But almost overnight, largely negative reactions were heard in River District and across the nation. Intended to protect the public's right to privacy and to prevent mishandling or misuse of all categories of individual school file materials (such as academic records, letters of reference, and other confidential statements), this law, at the same time, required major changes in school operating style, particularly a new openness in dealing with parents and the public in general. It aroused genuine fear within the educational bureaucracy in River District, and across the state of Wyoming, especially among administrators, teachers, counselors, and personnel officers. In the first version of the proposed law which local education authorities read (before certain qualifying amendments were passed), the following endorsement of parents' rights to initiate litigation in order to redress violations of privacy, was, for example, interpreted in River District with nothing less than alarm:

> Parents shall have an opportunity for a hearing to challenge the content of their child's school records, to insure that the records are not inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the privacy or other rights of students, and to provide an opportunity for the correction or deletion of any such inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise inappropriate data contained therein.

The potential for litigation of this sort, pitting parents against educators, was not taken lightly. Instead, it put members of the educational establishment on the defensive. As one observer had noted:

> Despite the purpose and intent of the law, it has done more to sensitize school personnel to their vulnerability to becoming involved in possible litigation than it has to accomplish its more serious intent, which is to afford some guarantee to society that persons handling pupil records are properly trained. (Worzbyt 1976: 359-360)

Details of the impending legislation reached River District in August and early September, just as the new school year was getting under way. Concern centered around three parts of the law: the one just cited which allows parents access to their children's school files and endorses their right to litigation where justified; one which permits teachers, as alumni, access to their own college or university job placement files; and one which regulates access to the field by researchers and other non-local third parties. Only the latter issue affected my research in a direct way, but the overall climate of apprehension and distrust created by the combination of misunderstanding and concern about all facets of the law was detrimental to the overall research effort in River District.

The first of the three issues involved misleading and potentially libelous statements which parents might find in their children's files. Written comments by teachers, for example, which were filed in confidence about "Johnny's" or "Jane's" performance in school, his or her home life, or other subjective observations of a personal nature were now open to parental inspection and reaction. Formerly, the contents of student files had been open only to qualified school authorities such as teachers, counselors, and administrators. Now, both the confidentiality of pupil files and the relative safety of school teachers and other officials were threatened. Administrators in River District talked about the need to search and purge pupil files of anything which might be construed as critical of, or detrimental to, individuals, and which might be used in

court against school authorities. This, along with the second issue, posed a direct threat to the power and status authority of the local educational bureaucracy.

Access by school alumni to their university placement files was the second issue which bothered both local school administrators in River District and state university placement authorities in Laramie. It had related implications regarding the nature of bureaucracy and power, particularly undermining the safety of school officials who may have written confidential statements for the job placement files of teachers in their employ. The reaction of the state university's placement bureau director exemplified local concern, and raised some important questions about the nature of local control and of participatory democracy.

On November 13, the placement bureau director circulated a three-page memo and a copy of the new law to all Wyoming school administrators. The memo was printed on bright yellow paper to attract attention and began with this message in bold caps (emphasis in the original):

> THE INFORMATION HEREIN IS VERY, VERY IMPORTANT AND MAY REQUIRE YOUR ACTION PRIOR TO TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1974.
>
> PLEASE CAREFULLY STUDY IT AS SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENT OFFICE OPERATING PROCEDURES ARE INVOLVED.

School administrators were warned that, "This significant legislation has far-reaching implications for...daily operation[s]..." The memo continues to say that, after November 19:

> all letters of reference or recommendations...presently on file in our office, and all future letters you may write for our registrants will be open to inspection by the registrant to whom the file pertains. There is no provision for a grand-father clause excluding letters of reference submitted prior to the date the legislation was signed into law.

> If you have provided our office with letters of reference which you would now like removed...we suggest that you have the right to remove them and should so inform us in writing of this desire prior to November 19, 1974. Your right to remove the reference is based upon the common law notion that the individual who makes the record has the first right to change it or delete it. Letters of reference which remain in placement files after November 19, 1974 will be available for inspection by students and alumni who then will have the right to remove any reference they wish.[12]

The placement bureau director went on to express other serious concerns about the new law. He listed several burdens it placed on local and university officials regarding provision for access to files, rights to remove references in their files by individuals, requirements for written consent to release file materials to third parties, and the large problem of notifying the general public about enactment and the intent of the new law. This latter responsibility of full disclosure of the law and communication to the public of its right to access to individual files was placed squarely on the shoulders of local education agency administrators. In River District this necessitated an openness and directness toward the general public to a degree never previously experienced. In the past, River District officials, like many school officials elsewhere, had relied primarily on their school board members and on open meetings of the board to provide liaison with the public. Individual parent-teacher conferences also demonstrated a small measure of openness between the school and its constituency. But now, the new law required that local education agencies even more directly and immediately inform the public of their rights, or face the threat of withdrawal of federal funding.

The end of this memo epitomizes Wyomingites' generally negative sentiments toward big government:

> It is obvious that this legislation has drastically affected our operations and in a direction which we feel is adverse. You should be aware that this legislation was passed without any hearings and without involving representatives of the many agencies affected by

> the legislation. We hope and believe that our reference writers have been honest had have made only factual comments in their letters of reference...
>
> We are entering a new era in educational employment. This era is one which appears to challenge our past practices and procedures. However, by working together and remaining in harmony with the spirit of the applicable legislation, we believe we can improve our personnel procedures in the employment of educational personnel.
>
> Your assistance in this confusing situation will be genuinely appreciated.

Release of student record information to third parties was the third issue of concern in River District, the one that most directly involved my research. And, like the issue of access by alumni to placement files, this issue was also stretched in the local perspective to include a more generic concern: not only <u>if</u> records and information should be made available to me as an "outside researcher," but <u>how</u> that information might ultimately be analyzed or interpreted and used in subsequent reports and publications.

The question of whether or not I had legitimate access to student files and other records required in connection with the study of Experimental Schools was answered in a letter to River District from the national director of the ES program in early December, 1974.[13] I was, the director assured them, a legal and authorized representative of the federal government. But the concern and anger generated by passage of the Buckley Amendment had already adversely influenced local sentiment about the continued presence (threat) of an outside researcher, and nothing federal authorities did or said subsequently could change that.

Changing Ground Rules

Colfer (1976) has described a research dilemma concerning "Rights, Responsibilities and Reports" in which she and her husband, on another Project Rural site, encountered many of the same problems as I did in River District. The staff of Abt Associates (called "Crex" in Colfer's account), planned from the beginning to maintain a strict prohibition on information flow (particularly evaluative information) between the researchers and government officials, in order to ensure researcher credibility on site. In Project Rural, this meant avoiding all NIE officials, on or off site. Any communications of a nonsubstantive or of a contractual nature (e.g., the issue of whether or not I was an "authorized representative" of NIE) were to be carefully channeled through Abt Associates' headquarters staff and only then to relevant officials at NIE in Washington, D.C. Of course, local school officials were free to communicate with any party to the research, in any manner they chose.

All on-site researchers understood, furthermore, that the research being done by this project was to be summative, not formative, in nature. That is, there was no provision for feedback of any substantive information about the project until it was over. All relevant data and analyses were to be made public only at the end of the project, after June 1978. By avoiding formative evaluation we assumed that concern for feedback and threat of reprisals to local projects, whether financial or otherwise, would be nil. Finally, we were allowed freedom in choosing our own focus and methods for the case study. No one else would direct our individual ethnographic efforts other than to see that we dealt with Experimental Schools, educational change, and community in some meaningful and useful manner(s).

With these understandings, I entered River District, much as my colleagues were entering their respective sites elsewhere in the project, to build the necessary good image and rapport. I was aware that I, as a social scientist, had no natural place in the rational scheme of the school bureaucracy. The anthropologist in this situation is seen as: "At best extraneous; at worst...as an active interferer" (Britan 1978c: 5). I was both: extraneous at first, but in the end, an interference and a threat. "To study a bureaucracy, an anthropologist must find his place in a sharply delimited environment. He must cope with the paramount relationships of power and authority, with overt manipulations of political power, and with the conscious biasing of data to meet personal and professional goals" (ibid.). Understanding and coping with these contingencies were part of the process of creating a workable strategy for the study of power. It was clear in my case, as it was to the Colfers', that spelling out the basic ground rules about the nonreportive nature of the research, about our strict avoidance of federal officials, was "necessary in order to gain the confidence and trust of the local people" (Colfer 1976: 33).

The paramount need of the Project Rural on-site researchers was to establish an honest image of neutrality, independence, and individual integrity to the greatest degree possible under the circumstances. A great deal of discussion was held among the researchers about how to best ensure the confidentiality of informants and at the same time retain the hands-off policy in the "experiment" we were employed to study. We sought more than anything else to reduce contamination of the experiment by any purposeful or inadvertent feedback of evaluative information. It was under

this assumption that local officials had, after all, conceded to our presence on site in the first place. We owed them our full commitment to that goal.

Many of us had been attracted to this project because of its experimental yet naturalistic aspects. We understood that this experiment would be a test, a trial of sorts, to determine if comprehensive and systematic change at the local level, by local initiative but with federal funding, could be accomplished in small school districts, and if so, the hows, the whys, and the replicability of it. As summative researchers with no interim contacts with NIE, our observations and subsequent analysis would, we thought, have little substantive impact on the ongoing experiment at each site.

"How naive!" one federal official later exclaimed to me in disbelief--to which I could only register anger and deep frustration. Not only did the research issue impact the whole ES program, but the limit to which such applied research could be taken in this sort of contracted situation became itself a critical issue.

The causes of the apparent change in the rules by NIE can be easily traced. In 1974, NIE came under the scrutiny of the Congress, their funding source, over the issue of accountability in the discharge of educational research and development (R&D) programs (see Miller 1974), Phi Delta Kappan 1974, Stivers 1973).[14] In the fact of congressional threat to their budget, officers within the Institute responded by raising questions about the internal accountability of many of their own programs. Within Experimental Schools it was thought necessary to require reports from all on-site researchers, for example, and to evaluate them immediately--not four or five years hence, but now, in the midst of the research endeavor--to determine their relevance, utility, and competence. What we had begun as

a form of summative research would, by this change, become insidiously and uncontrollably formative with the potential for stimulating feedback to the "experiment" from officials of the funding agency themselves who would inevitably read whatever we wrote. Furthermore, it was implied that NIE officials would also exercise the right to direct research efforts toward issues which they (not we, nor the locals) considered important.

The first word of this troublesome change of ground rules came through a surprise announcement from Abt Associates staff at Cambridge in mid-1974. Beginning immediately, we were told, we would need to prepare annual reports, called "working papers," which were due each December. To counter the issue of formative feedback, Abt and NIE officials agreed that these interim reports would not be made public so that they would not influence the projects. Their contents, presumably substantive issues about progress in local projects, would, we were assured, be kept safe within the research firm and the federal agency. We were admonished not to show anything to local informants, so as not to contaminate the local experiment.

The request to keep our writings from our informants seemed like secret research to many of us on-site researchers, and it made us extremely uncomfortable. If word got out on site that we were now submitting what amounted to secret reports to the funding agency, not only would it breach confidences and threaten rapport between us and the locals, but it might also be legitimately interpreted by our colleagues as a violation of professional ethics. Our responsibility was to our informants, the local public, first, and only much later to the federal funding agency.

It seemed ludicrous under the circumstances to have to point out, furthermore, that neither we nor they, the locals, trusted federal officials, given the current climate of Watergate. Who would believe any guarantee

that someone in NIE--given its serious problems of survival noted in Chapter Three--would not use the information in such reports to make decisions about future funding or to impose other restrictions on local school activities? Repercussions based on such "secret" reporting or even presumed "leaks" by a researcher to a federal officer would be devastating. Researcher viability and credibility on site would become so low so fast that, indeed, he would risk being bodily thrown off site by irate informants.

The ethics of the issue caused serious concern about the future of our research on the project. We were forced, as Colfer (1976) has noted, to make a critical choice: either quit, or acquiesce to the request for secret reports, or prepare fully public reports. Quitting was a very real possibility, and the fact that it was seriously considered by some researchers led Abt Associates' officials to confront NIE with a request to back down.

Rather than recounting the long and tedious story of negotiations over this issue between me and my informants on site, and between the Abt Associates "heavies" (the firm's vice presdients) and NIE officials, suffice it to say that a compromise was reached whereby it was anticipated that the researchers could maintain their credibility on site and concerns about leaks, feedback, and reprisals would be eliminated. We would still have to prepare reports, the so-called "working papers" (company jargon), and submit them through Abt's Cambridge staff to NIE, but with this significant difference--no one within the ES program offices at NIE would see the work. Rather, the reports would be addressed to another individual, a well-respected ethnographic researcher working elsewhere within the Institute on a project

unrelated to Experimental Schools. He would read the reports in private and take steps to be sure they were not inadvertently left where ES program officers might see them. He would make independent judgments about the compentence of each author and the relevance and utility of each product to the goals of NIE, and only then would he report verbally to ES program officials.[15]

Hence, by roundabout reasoning, we would not be violating our promises on site about reporting back to ES program staff, although we would, on the other hand, be meeting NIE's need to know about the progress of our research and to appear accountable regarding it.

Despite the talk of quitting, no one did; instead we all decided to try to work under the compromise conditions, to which a number of different unique local strategies were added. "Laundering" the data in reports was a much discussed option all around. (The terminology is from Watergate.) Some researchers made their reports public, but wrote only about those aspects of the local site which were already public knowledge (such as school district history) and steadfastly avoided references to problems being encountered by the ES project. NIE officials had encouraged us to deal with the early phase of the local projects, so other researchers submitted the required work but avoided commenting on substantive issues. On some sites there was little concern or fanfare about either the contents of a report or whether or not locals should see the piece, while in other instances, informants and researchers both were quite sensitive to these matters.

My First Annual Working Paper

Much earlier, I had begun writing on some of the problematic issues of the first two years of project planning and implementation, and of the nature of federal-local relations. After the compromise I chose to continue writing on these topics for my first annual working paper.

In River District I adopted a strategy of taking the issues of new ground rules and the compromise directly to my key informants, the superintendents, to allow them some part in their solution and in the preparation of the first working paper. We discussed various options and they seemed unperturbed when I said that my associate researcher and I would write about project issues of the first two years--essentially documenting the history and the confusion of planning and early implementation. She and I also agreed that we would share a draft of our report with them prior to its being sent to NIE and, at their discretion, to share it with others in the administration, on the school board, in the schools, or in the community. They would have a month in which to critique and comment on the report, whereafter we would make whatever further changes or corrections we thought reasonable before submitting it under the compromise conditions to Abt Associates and, through Abt, to the appointed reviewer within NIE. We would retain our freedom to interpret and analyze the data in any manner we chose, however, as part of the privilege of free inquiry. They agreed to these new ground rules, and we proceeded to prepare the report, assuming the best.

What my associate and I wrote and submitted to the superintendents in November 1974, was, we felt, an essentially complimentary view of the site and of the project issues. We were confident that it breached no

code of ethics and that no confidential issues were raised; all of it had been adequately aired in public and semi-public forum on site, and at times with NIE project officers present. And much of the data had been corroborated by me through several local sources, both inside and out of the school administration. The piece raised serious questions only about NIE's operating strategies toward the school district (Messerschmidt and Richen 1974).

Other researchers in Project Rural who showed their report material to the locals at their respective sites reported hearing comments like, "Oh, this is just anthropology," and little more. But when we showed the draft of our first annual report to the superintendents in River District, all hell broke loose!

The stormy relations between River District and NIE noted in Chapter Five had been improving, and in that context, our candid discussion of earlier problems, conflict, and confusion was interpreted by one school official as an attempt on our part to uncover old wounds and to rekindle old animosities. To administrators concerned about refunding in 1976 (for the last two years of the project), our report was considered a potential bombshell. In the context of the fuss over privacy and secrecy brought on by passage of the Buckley Amendment and the Watergate scandal, the document was to them excessively revealing. And concerning the compromise worked out about reporting to NIE, the local superintendents now informed us that they saw no compromise at all. To them, NIE was simply one part of a blurry and amorphous big bureaucracy in WAshington, D.C., within which no one could be trusted, not even the neutral ethnographer who would, alone, be reading our report. And not the least significant, any sort of rapport between the locals and me remaining after local reactions

to the Buckley Amendment was now clearly jeopardized. I was assured by the superintendents that they held nothing against me personally, but this report, and the changes that its writing and submission implied, told them that I was no more than another powerless cog in the "system," a system which they simply could neither control nor trust. In retrospect, that I ever thought I was anything else, contracted up to a powerful federal agency as I was, was indeed naive thinking on my part. I had built my rapport with local officials and citizens on sand which the storms of the Buckley Amendment and NIE's survival problems were not washing away. Further, both the new law and NIE's problems were, in turn, merely frontal systems, localized reflections, of the larger national storm surrounding Watergate.

CONCLUSIONS

Hindsight is the most important product of experience. From hindsight comes insight and wisdom, and with insight comes the stuff of more effective and more realistic strategies for the future.

When I entered River District in 1973, I knew in a fuzzy way that I was embarking on non-traditional research for an anthropologist. Initially naive about the sorts of problems applied research "at home" in this sort of modern American setting can create, I had no special strategies in mind other than those for which I had been trained in a traditional graduate program and which I had employed only a year earlier in a mountain village study in the Nepal Himalaya (see Messerschmidt 1976a). My research methods in River District were essentially the same as my methods in the Himalaya. But my initially poor understanding of the subtle differences between the two settings very nearly negated my efforts in conducting the River District research.

Some anthropologists argue that studying the culture of power at home is no different from studying it in more traditional research settings abroad. By this logic, those who first studied the power of African chiefs or the politics and authority of Hindu caste, for examples, encountered the same sorts of cultural constraints on access to data, limitations on the scope and depth of inquiry, and the same kinds of secrecy and privacy which pervade the culture of power everywhere. Perhaps, albeit intuitively, when I came to River District I already knew that I had a thing or two to learn about the differences.

Gerald Britan (1978c) states that the primary difference between traditional anthropological studies and the studies of contemporary bureaucracies is in the nature of the data, and that, although a bureaucracy is not the same thing as a community, the ethnographic study of bureaucracy is, in principle, no different. I disagree. The primary difference between traditional studies of communities and the new studies of bureaucracy and power is not, primarily, one of data (although there are obvious differences between communities and bureaucracies in kind and sources of data), but in the nature of expectations between researcher and subjects and of the strategies necessary to establish an effective researcher-informant relationship in a bureaucratic setting.

It is a commonplace assumption that the foreign anthropologist in a tribal or peasant society abroad, as a stranger, can be excused for all sorts of misunderstandings, improprieties, lack of knowledge, and insensitivities to even the simplest forms of local etiquette. But those sorts of excuses are luxuries that the ethnographer at home is neither privileged nor allowed to enjoy. In doing fieldwork in our own society we have little time to learn, no margin for blunders, little or no time to

reconsider and reapproach the informant or the data with new insight. We may have already compromised the data through inappropriate actions or insensitivity regarding how we are viewed and expected to act by our informants. The underlying difference is in who the researcher is to his or her informants. To me, this is the most basic difference between modern social scientists doing research at home and their predecessors in exotic foreign settings. In my case, while I attempted to "see" and describe and analyze "differences" in the Wyoming situation, my informants, my friends and neighbors, the superintendents, the area principals, the teachers, the ranchers, the miners, the townspeople all saw me as little or no different from themselves. Clearly, I was a newcomer and an outsider, but essentially I was just as American, just as much a member of the general American society, as they were. I was, in effect, no stranger at all. I only realized this late in the course of the research. Consequently, the need for strategies and role relationships different from those traditionally developed by anthropologists for research among "other" people came in reaction to various impositions on my activities and on the conduct of my research, not as it should have come--in anticipation of the unique problems involved in research at home and in research on power and bureaucracy.

Perhaps Yehudi Cohen was right when he implied that the traditional anthropological enterprise is not adequately prepared (conceptually) to accomplish the objectives of research in societies other than those of tribals and peasant peoples (1977: 389). I am not altogether convinced, however, that we lack what he calls the requisite "concepts, paradigms, and methods" to study parts or all of our own modern and industrial society. The problem lies in the dearth of new strategies for role relationship and

action within which to put our well-tested methods and techniques to best use. There are many studies which employ good techniques within a relatively traditional methodological approach studying parts and segments of American society and culture. Harry Wolcott's (1978) study of teachers and school administrators is a case in point. A very traditional concept of moiety (dual organization) derived from the study of tribal societies, was innovatively adapted to the American educator subculture and used to explain some of the dynamics of an educational change effort in an Oregon school system. Likewise, traditional techniques of participant-observation and interviews were used to generate the data on which his analysis was made.[16] Few such studies, however, deal specifically with the culture of power in American society, where innovative techniques and strategies are most needed.

Anthropologists athome present many faces, confront many challenges, suffer many gains and losses in the course of their scientific inquiry. Applied anthropologists in particular, charged as they are with practicing what they know about social behavior and cultural systems, frequently find themselves in situations where the dictates of the powerful and concurrent issues of place and time severely limit their ability to function. All too often, the solution to human problems gets lost in the shuffle. And, despite the best intentions of the people involved, considerations about maintaining institutional agendas or of defending the host organization or agency against threats--particularly by keeping the processes of power and authority secret and unapproachable to outsiders--tend to undermine individual human integrity and good purpose.

Applied anthropologists who presume to study issues of bureaucracy, power, and authority (and it seems unlikely that a sensitive applied

anthropologist can avoid such issues) should beware. Until we are more experienced in "Working for the Man" (Chambers 1977b), in "Bargaining with the Devil" (Clinton 1976), and in "Managing and Being Managed" (Trend 1978), we must proceed with caution. Much further study of the culture of power is needed before we can attempt to effectively control or change it, or to create better strategies of methodology to cope with it and fully understand it.

It has been a decade since Eric Wolf touched this same nerve ending: "If I am correct in saying anthropology has reached its present impasse because it has so systematically disregarded the problems of power, then we must find ways of educating ourselves in the realities of power," and in the "processes of power" (1969: 10). Through many studies of power and authority at home we have expanded the syllabus for this learning experience somewhat since then, but we still have much to learn.[17] This account of one "observer" confronting limitations imposed by powerful "fundees," research "contractees," and local "observees" is presented as a case in point.

NOTES

PREFACE

[1] The subject of anthropologist as key informant is eloquently discussed by Hennigh (n.d.).

CHAPTER ONE

[1] River District is a pseudonym for a rural school district in Wyoming. All local place names in this study have also been disguised to preserve the privacy of the research site and the school and community people.

[2] As elsewhere in the research on the rural Experimental Schools program, a distinction is made between the "projects" and the "program." The term "project" refers to ES activities in ten local school district communities, of which River District is one. "Program," on the other hand, refers to the Experimental Schools as a nationally conceived endeavor which includes all of the involved rural communities and local projects (as well as another eight urban projects). See Corwin (1977: 12).

[3] For six months in 1974 I was assisted in the research by Dr. Marilyn C. Richen, as an associate on-site researcher; but for the rest of the research I worked alone in River District.

[4] A number of anthropologists hold the view that the study of power implies not only research but action, oriented toward change and improvement (from the point of view of the relatively powerless) in the quality of life and especially in control over the modes of production and the allocation of scarce resources, both tangible (e.g., raw materials, finished products) and intangible (e.g., critical decisions). Viewpoints on the issue of the researcher's involvement range from moderate (or traditional) to activist (or radical). Wolcott (1975: 18), for example, feels that the anthropologist should retain a "respect for deferred judgement." On the other hand, the more radical or activist point of view is held by Berreman (1968, 1973), Wolf (1969) and others. A range of perspectives may be found in sources such as Angrosino (1976), Barnett (1956), Bastide (1973), Eddy and Partridge (1978a), Foster (1969, 1973), Hymes (1974), Naylor (1973), and Wax, et al (1960), to name a few. This list is by no means exhaustive.

[5] The inevitable turnover of personnel filling some of these roles and offices brought the number of persons I dealt with as key informants to almost double the number of roles and offices indicated.

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CHAPTER TWO

[1] In 1869 Spring County (at more than twice its present geographic size) had only 460 inhabitants. Within eleven years, by 1880, the population of just the two major railroad towns alone--Mesaville, the county seat, and Carbon, now a ghost town near Wister--was 1,816, quadruple the earlier whole county figure (Larsen 1965: 71, 108).

[2] All places and figures reflect the facts as of 1972, at the beginning of the Experimental Schools project in River District. In some instances, the information covers the entire period of the ES project, from 1972 to 1978.

[3] Only the region's severe winter weather has saved some of Wister's former and largely highway-oriented business district. Because of typically high winds and drifting snow on parts of the new interstate highway near Cow Creek and Marathon, many winter travelers, and especially the transcontinental truckers, prefer the safer, less windy older road through Wister.

[4] It is difficult to give precise population figures for these towns in the years between census counts. Most figures are estimates calculated from research observations combined with the expert opinions (guesses, really) of local residents and town officials. No local records are kept on population growth except at the schools, and school enrollment figures are not always indicative of true population growth. Young bachelor miners and couples without children are common in mining towns where growth is rapid and constant population turnover the norm.

[5] In an earlier study (Messerschmidt and Richen 1975), I have described the history of pioneer education in far more detail; see also Burns, et al. (1955) and Conner (1964).

[6] For two recent reconsiderations of the wisdom of school district consolidation see Tyack (1974) and Sher (1978).

[7] Another anonymous writer quoted in the same source (Conner 1964) penned this nostalgic epitaph to the rural schoolhouse:

> The old schoolhouse, old, sad and partially blind still stands on the hillside. It has been sold... but the owner hasn't moved it. Only by-gone teachers revisiting the neighborhood take pictures of it.

[8] On the one hand, take tiny Marathon School District in 1970-1971, with a district population of 70 people, pupil enrollments of only 15, but a per-pupil valuation (based primarily on oil industry taxes) of a whopping $161,484. On the other hand, compare Mesaville School District,

largest and poorest in the county, with a population of 9,000 people, school enrollments of 2,205 students, and a valuation of only $10,960 per pupil, well below the state average of $15,309 for that year. Altogether, per-pupil valuations in two of the five parts of River District were below the average, while three were well above it by approximately 100 percent, 140 percent, and 540 percent each.

[9] The fine details of school district reorganization and unification for all of Spring County (both River and Mesa districts) are given in Messerschmidt and Richen (1975: Chapter 5).

[10] Reprinted by permission of the author.

[11] The precise administrative structure that evolved out of the consolidation of River District schools is discussed more fully in Chapters Three and Four.

CHAPTER THREE

[1] The announcement was sent from the Office of Education in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Shortly afterward, in August 1972, the Experimental Schools program was transferred to the newly created National Institute of Education (NIE) where it remained through 1978.

[2] See Herriott and Gross (1979) for the full text of this important document.

[3] All school districts of fewer than 2,500 students received the announcement. Approximately 320 of them responded with letters of interest in the program, from which 12 districts were selected for further consideration. Six rural districts were eventually awarded one-year planning grants with a "moral commitment" of four more years of funding. Six other districts, including River District, were awarded conditional planning grants with the understanding that long-term funding would depend upon the results of the planning process. Eventually, four of the latter six were fully funded which, added to the successful first six, comprised a complement of ten rural ES project sites.

[4] It is considered normal, however, for school buses to regularly transport local children over hundreds of miles of hazardous mountain roads within the school district during some of winter's worst weather and driving conditions.

[5] In the River District plan, components were called "goals" and facets were called "components." To avoid confusion, in this study the terms are used as they appear in most other ES documents and reports. "Components" are here defined as the primary categories (or topics areas, like career and cultural education, evaluation, etc.) of the project and "facets" refer to aspects of the school system (like staff development and the use of time, space, and facilities) which the planners were required to address formally in their quest for comprehensive educational change.

[6] Lack of specific course curriculum plans coupled with a wealth of rhetoric about management (like integrating activities, upgrading libraries, evaluating, and involving the community) were early clues to me that the real activity in this project was somewhere other than with students in classrooms. This realization further strengthened my quest to study school and project administration.

[7] The official sanction of local administrators and educators for career education as the central priority of the project came late in 1972 when preliminary discussions were held regarding the possibility of Spring Creek's junior high school participating in a joint federal-regional Educational Technology Demonstration (ETD) satellite project featuring the use of career education materials. ETD was unrelated to ES, but its simultaneous development through another outside federal program gave impetus to ES planners in River District to push harder for a career education component. The ETD satellite project lasted one year, 1974-75. During that year, programs transmitted to the Spring Creek receiver by satellite were recorded on video cassettes (purchased out of the ES budget) for replay in junior high school classrooms throughout the district as part of the integration of career education components with existing curricula.

CHAPTER FOUR

[1] Values have been defined by the anthropologist George Spindler (1963: 20) as "desirables...motivating people to behave in acceptable and worthwhile ways," and, be it added, in relatively predictable ways as well. Felix Keesing (1963: 141) defines values similarly as "affectively charged tendencies to action which involve preference and often conscious choices among alternatives." Values are essentially ethical considerations, not facts. Herbert Simon, the renowned student of administrative behavior, has put it this way: "factual propositions cannot be derived from ethical ones [values] by any process of reasoning, nor can ethical propositions be compared directly with the facts--since they assert "oughts" rather than "facts." Since making decisions involves valuations of this kind it is important to appreciate the "imperative function" of values as premises for action (Simon 1957: 46, and passim).

[2] This definition of culture is a modification of one in Spradley and McCurdy (1975).

[3] In studies of the relationship between work and leisure, some analysts point to this general tendency as an example of "task generalization," defined as the tendency for a stimulus, such as ranching for example, to which a particular response has been learned to evoke similar responses, such as participation in fairs and livestock shows (Witt and Bishop 1970).

[4] In mining, an intensive and often boring and monotonous involvement with the work tends to demand a "period of respite" during which relaxing and personally recreating activities, usually very distinct from mining, are sought (see Witt and Bishop 1970). Compare this attitude with the typically blurred lines between work and leisure activity among ranchers.

[5] Under a 1963 Wyoming state law which prohibits compulsory unionization, unionism has been actively resisted by many River District miners (see Larson 1965: 537-538).

[6] There is a story (apocryphal, no doubt) about the Wyoming rancher who came upon a car (with an eastern license plate) stuck in the snow by the side of the road. The rancher stopped and got out of his pickup, and quietly, without comment, began attaching a tow chain to the stuck car in order to pull it out. Meanwhile, the distraught driver got out of his car and, looking glum, muttered something about "Who in Hell would want to live in this God-forsaken country...!" At that, the rancher calmly unhitched the chain, threw it back in his pickup, climbed in and, without yet a word, drove away.

[7] The uncomprehending outsider deviates radically from local social philosophy. Deviance, as sociologists have pointed out, is a natural and inevitable consequence of the application of one group's norms to outsiders. It lies not in the peculiarities of individual behavior so much as in the interaction between persons of different groups who follow different rules based on different values (Becker 1963: 14). Rules are at the foundation of group identity and social life. "Without rule-following," notes Thomas Szasz, "there cannot be social life" (1970: 280). By understanding and appreciating the importance of the rules, values, norms, and cultural premises that distinguish social groups, one is better able to predict and prepare for, and perhaps forestall or ameliorate, the inevitable conflicts which arise at their conjunction.

[8] The "Protestant Ethic" was first discussed at length by the German sociologist Max Weber who considered it to be a combination of both material and ideal, or "spiritual," interests which directly govern man's conduct (Gerth and Mills 1946).

[9] Wolcott (1973) and others have noted the congruence between the values of school administrators throughout the United States and the "puritan" (or Protestant) ethic similar to the description of the River District way of life.

[10] The theme of "rugged individualism" in the rural American West is a popular one in the pulp literature and other media, and apparently it has credibility in some instances. Schultz (1972: 39), for example, notes that the eastern Oregon ranchers he studied "exhibited strong negative aspirations regarding membership or participation in voluntary [civic, social, and trade] associations" which leads one to assume that they preferred to "tough it out alone," independently. On the other hand, observations in Wyoming and those of other researchers who have studied life styles elsewhere in the American West disagree and see in successful ranchers, at least, a dual ethic of individualism bound up intimately with affiliation and association. Bennett's (1969) study of ranchers and farmers on the Great Plains of southern Saskatchewan affirms this; see also Pomeroy (1955) for a similar point of view.

[11] Local control is related to the concept of social control which is defined by Goldschmidt as denoting:

> the influence of power of one individual or group over others, whether that power rests upon a use of force, upon legally established mechanisms, upon the powers of persuasion, upon established customs and attitudes of the people, or a combination of these. More generally it applies to extra-legal powers built upon custom and persuasion" (1978: 148-149).

In the present context, control means the influence of power of local people over their fellows' behavior, as well as over the conduct and management of their institutions and similar group structures. Like social control, the concept of local control here is based on the extra-legal powers of custom and tradition.

[12] Walt Reynolds was, at the time, the president of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association and a past Wyoming Game and Fish Commissioner. His sentiments are widely felt throughout the state and the region.

[13] The school board consisted of two representatives from each of four trustee election districts, and one at large. The election districts corresponded closely with the boundaries of the previously independent school districts and the designated attendance areas, with the exception that the Marathon attendance area was joined--for trustee election purposes only--with Wister-Rim.

[14]Making Marathon semi-independent of the Wister-Rim administrative area by the separate appointment of a local head teacher who was directly responsible to the central office in Spring Creek was a political strategy designed to allow Marathon a modicum of independence which it had previously enjoyed as a wealthy autonomous district but which it had lost, in part, by reapportionment of the trustee election districts under consolidation. See the preceding footnote.

[15]When, later, the first assistant superintendent resigned and was subsequently replaced, the new appointee was selected from outside River District, from a school district elsewhere in the state. At least one local administrative principal (former superintendent), however, felt that he should have gotten the appointment.

[16]Later, in 1976, a full-time elementary school principal was appointed at Union, which by then had the largest school enrollments and was the most seriously affected by rapid population growth and concomitant demands for social and educational services. This appointment freed the administrative principal there from a large burden of responsibility, allowing him to concentrate more fully on the overall administration of the Union area schools. For similar reasons, an administrative assistant in charge of buildings, grounds, transportation, and food services, was appointed subordinate to the administrative principal at Spring Creek that same year.

[17]The figure reflects the average daily membership (or ADM) and as such gives no indication of the year-long turnover of students at schools such as Union and Wister, near the mines.

[18]Sproull, Weiner and Wolf (1978) categorically reject the "rational model" of organizational behavior for NIE, a model attributed to March and Simon 1958, Cyert and March 1963, Allison 1971, and Steinbruner 1974.

[19]Pardon the description of NIE's "behavior." Students of organizational behavior frequently commit this fallacy of misplaced concreteness, first attributed to Aristotle who criticized Plato for attributing efficient causality to conceptual forms. By this fallacy, organizations tend to be described in terms of human behavior, as if the organization or agency behaved and exhibited cognition and judgment and could, sui generis, make decisions and take action. The analogy is probably used because it is semantically easy and because it avoids the charge of "reductionism" so often injudiciously leveled at those who insist that behavior is manifest only in individuals as opposed to inanimate, mental constructs or conceptual forms such as agencies and institutions. I perpetuate the fallacy here only in form, to reflect the rhetoric of the organizational behaviorists on whom some of this account relies, but fully recognizing the danger in so doing; see Bidney 1967: 114, 119, 137.

[20]For example, Sproull, Weiner and Wolf (1978: 132) report that Robert Binswanger, the first ES Program Director "was supremely assertive and self-assured" and on occasion steadfastly refused to cooperate with his superiors in either OE or NIE about certain things.

[21]At times the administrators of River District became so upset with officials within the ES hierarchy at NIE that they threatened to write to certain Congressmen to express their consternation and concern. Such comments about "writing to so-and-so in Congress" were heard during a particularly trying time in River District during the late summer of 1973 (described in the next chapter) and reportedly, similar feelings were expressed when, during the previous year of planning, the ES project officer would not respond to letters, questions, and requests for specific advice and assistance. It is interesting to note a statement attributed to Congressman John Brademus (Representative from Indiana) about the negative image that certain practitioners held about NIE as a result of poor communications with the agency. It is highly unlikely that any of the "complaints" he notes came from River District, but they do reflect some of the frustration of River District administrators and trustees nonetheless:

> Individual inquiries and their disposition are an important kind of image-bearing communication. I have been distressed to receive at least a half-dozen legitimate complaints of delays, lost proposals, and outright refusals to return calls from outside individuals. Several letters I have personally referred have been handled without adequate attention to their substance, and more important, without attention to the impression such lapses create in Congressional staff members and the public. [John Brademas 1974: 8, as quoted in Sproull, Weiner and Wolf 1978: 209]

[22]Some of NIE's "directed management" posture became obvious when concern was expressed over the direction, content, and intent of Abt Associates' research efforts in 1974. It led NIE officials to press for a change in the ground rules of on-site research, for example, and to attempt (unsuccessfully) to guide the nature of the final research products. These issues are discussed in Chapter 7.

[23]My study was of Experimental Schools in River District, not in the nation's capital. Regardless, I was able to observe and document the working behavior of a variety of ES officials on site on many occasions between 1973 and 1976. I also recorded numerous comments and actions by River District officials which revealed their perceptions of the federal agency and its agents. And I have met independently to conduct lengthy interviews with the last two project officers assigned to River District in 1974-1976. For my description and analysis of NIE and ES I have relied on all these observations, perceptions, and discussions as well as on such secondary sources as Herriott 1979, Sproull, Weiner and Wolf 1978, and Corwin 1977, and on such other anthropological and

sociological studies of bureaucratic behavior as Britan 1978a, 1978b, and 1978c, Simon 1957, and Merton 1952.

[24] The local perspectives, opinions, and beliefs about ES are analogous to the "social beliefs" and conventional wisdom about which Sproull, Weiner and Wolf speak in their discussion of the larger critical and highly negative public and education environment in which NIE functioned nationally (1978: 206). The point here is that it is such "social beliefs" and "local perspectives" about a situation or phenomena which tend to guide behavior and action or reaction to that situation or phenomena. In this instance, what people believed about NIE and ES in River District or elsewhere was reflected in their interactions with officers of the federal agency. This maxim is stated in the classic "Thomas Theorem": <u>if the individual defines a situation as real, it is therefore real in its consequences</u>.

[25] In this regard Gallaher's ideas are very close to Barnett's (1953), from whom he admits inspiration. See particularly Barnett's Chapter 10, "The Advocates of Change." See also Barnett (1958).

[26] "When project officers like this one consciously assumed the role of technical assistant, they thought of themselves as colleagues and partners in a common enterprise," Corwin reports (1977: 22). One unidentified project officer referred to it as an "interactive" role, a role which fits the pragmatic advocate style. "I take my role to be a partner in an experiment," this officer began:

> and while I may be a silent partner in a sense that I don't actually do the work, I certainly am involved in the project. . . . I stay out of the actual decision-making, in the sense that the operation of the project is theirs; it's not the federal government's and they're responsible for delivering the product or contract. But nevertheless, if I see, in my judgement, that they're putting themselves into jeopardy, I consider it my responsibility to point that out. And if they continue to do it, then fine, that's their decision. [Quoted in Corwin 1977: 22]

CHAPTER FIVE

[1] Herriott (1979) explains part of the problem of misunderstanding about the level and length of support available to River District. During the spring of 1973, in a period of considerable confusion and shifting priorities within NIE, there was apparently considerable discussion regarding the management of the ES program. A number of serious questions about ES in the rural districts were aired, among them:

> whether any future legal commitments should be in the form of a grant (as was the case for the planning year) or as a contract (which would give NIE greater control over the expenditure of funds); and whether the legal commitment should be for the full five-year period originally planned or for a shorter period. Late that spring, a decision was made to reaffirm the five-year moral commitment to the ten...districts that had demonstrated a willingness to continue... But, despite the aspiration of ES [staff]...to award four-year grants to each of the rural school districts at the end of their planning year, ...NIE [officials were now] able to authorize only three-year contracts. [(67), emphasis in the original]

And, in a direct reference to the misunderstanding and confusion about the length of funding, Herriott further explains that:

> Traditionally federal agencies have had the authority to commit funds to local school districts for no more than twelve months. Although ES leaders never realized their aspiration to gain the authority to commit funds for the full duration of each ES project, they considered gaining authority for three-year commitments to be a major victory. Such an accomplishment apparently meant very little to the school officials in River District who had been expecting a legal commitment at the end of their planning year of funds for the full five years of their project and felt betrayed when this turned out not to be the case. (72)

[2] The ES Program Director's actions of calling the trustees independently to sound them out on the issue of local project administration is an example of his "supremely assertive and self-assured" attitude, as it is described by Sproull, Weiner and Wolf (1978: 132). Another ES official who reviewed this incident in 1976, characterized the ES Director's intrusion into local school board politics less graciously as a "blatant piece of apparent dunderhead activity."

[3] River District officials considered the threat of contract cancellation to be a very real one. At one point, the assistant superintendent told the author who had been in the district less than a month: "Don't unpack. The project may be cancelled." And he asked me if I would stay on, as a private employee of the school district, to help with implementation of the project independent of NIE, should cancellation become fact.

[4] River District's outline for career education was borrowed from a nearby school district in the state. It was ultimately borrowed from a national

model which had received wide endorsement and attention as an educational priority in 1972 under President Nixon's Commissioner of Education, Sidney Marland. The attitude nationally, which was reflected locally, was one in which academic programs preparing youth for college were in disfavor. In the words of one national observer, "The villain...was general education programs that lacked specific goals and were not linked to the job market" (Spring 1976: 234; see also Sproull, Weiner and Wolf 1978).

5 Although boom conditions in the northern mining towns seemed to create a ready audience for community education programming, it was decided to restrict these activities to Spring Creek and Coopertown in the south until a strong and successful program was developed in these towns, and after the coordinator had gotten a "feel" for the district as a whole. Although conditions at Rim, in particular, as the most northerly and most remote boom town of the district, evoked considerable concern, community education activities were not established there for two years.

6 Committee members were sensitive about the meaning of "cultural" education. Several definitions had been voiced, and they felt that a change of committee name was necessary to clarify their purpose. For example, one trustee noted at a school board meeting that since patriotism was an integral part of "American culture," this project component should obviously address itself to promoting civic duty and national pride. On the other hand, a federal project officer once suggested, just as seriously, that recreational activities such as river rafting and horseback riding would be an apt expression of "local culture" in this project. In the ES plan, however, "cultural education" is described strictly in terms of the fine arts, such as music, drama, and poetry. (Besides, as one cultural committeeperson once said, "These kids float the river and ride horseback all summer long, for fun. Who'd want to spoil it by making it part of school?!")

7 Many of the district personnel, subordinate to the superintendents, spoke to me about problems with the project and in the district as a whole only after they were reassured that they would not be quoted nor would their identities be revealed. Some openly expressed fears of reprisal in terms of their employment in the district.

8 The choral group was organized and directed by my wife, while the arts festival was the work of the only woman on the school board, the wife of the Spring Creek veterinarian. Both events were immensely popular among Spring Creek and Copperton area residents.

9 Although the local director was considered to be the informal link with the federal agency, the trustees had designated formal responsibilities for federal programs to the assistant superintendent. Nonetheless, NIE and the ES staff had always considered the head superintendent to be the ultimately responsible school official, and all correspondence from ES offices in Washington, D.C., to River District were formally addressed to him.

CHAPTER SIX

[1] Much of the data one acquires from bureaucrats, especially in the form of plans and progress reports, is what is supposed to be happening, what should happen, and what is expected to happen. Often data on what <u>really</u> happens can be found only in the candid and somewhat offhand or private remarks of the system managers and the bystanders (<u>cf</u>. MacLennan n.d., Serber n.d.). (Some indications of the reality of a situation may come from disgruntled or marginal members of a group under study, but great caution is warranted in using this information, for it is often distorted.) The distinction here is between the <u>ideal</u>, which is most often expressed verbally and on paper for outside observers, and the <u>real</u> which is often expressed privately, if at all. Gerald Britan has noted the same tendency in his similar research within a federal agency (Britan 1978c). The ideal/real distinction is one which anthropologists have long noted in their research.

[2] The last item reflected a change, for administrative organization and school management practices had not been evaluated in any formal way in the past. Now, however, when the unification of River District was only two months old, the reorganization of the administration was a necessarily high priority, and the need to assess organizational structure and managerial practices was of immediate concern.

[3] For example, River District educators have tended not to trust the results of national educational testing instruments which they annually administer to all pupils, and they have often scoffed at standardized questionnaires used periodically in the district by the outside research company under contract to NIE to evaluate the ES project. Less openly, some teachers and administrators in the district have questioned the premises of the ES program itself. However, not all educators in River District felt this way, but those who did were vocal enough to create an impression that this parochial attitude epitomized the local norm. And, realistically, many of their complaints and suspicions about "Easterners" and "Bureaucrats" have never been satisfactorily or convincingly challenged. Unfortunately, this establishes a climate in which the programs and ideas of outsiders are at an initial disadvantage despite the best of intentions. Change agents in general have the burden of proof for their cause and they should be well aware of this environment of distrust.

[4] The evaluation expert who was contracted briefly in 1973 was not the same university person, mentioned in Chapter Four, whose plan (summarily rejected by the school district) was to engage graduate assistants in a year-long analysis of River District needs.

[5] The evaluation component in the original ES plan in River District bears little resemblance to later evaluation efforts there. Briefly, the original plan was divided into six parts: (1) a statement of purpose,

(2) functional characteristics (i.e., the collection, organization, analysis, and reporting of evaluative information, as well as the distinction between formative evaluation for ongoing feedback during the project and summative evaluation of the end product); (3) six steps for measuring progress (conceptualization, development, implementation, organization, demonstration, and dissemination); (4) categories of data (e.g., demographic, economic, personnel, community involvement, standardized achievement results, etc.); (5) techniques and instruments of evaluation (such as standardized tests and inventories, local teacher-made tests and reports, and interview schedules); and (6) dates and deadlines for evaluation committee work, school visitations, document reviews, interviews, data analysis, and report preparation and submission.

CHAPTER SEVEN

[1] Herriott (1979: 70) reports that of the $190 million originally anticipated to fund the entire Experimental Schools Program (eighteen rural and urban projects plus seven outside evaluation contracts), only $55 million, or less than one-third, was ultimately expended on the endeavor.

[2] Carol Weiss notes that the purpose of evaluation research

> is to measure the effects of a program against the goals it set out to accomplish as a means of contributing to subsequent decision making about the program and improving future programming... "The effects" emphasizes the outcomes of the program, rather than its efficiency, honesty, morale, or adherence to rules or standards. The comparison of effects with goals stresses the use of explicit criteria for judging how well the program is doing. [Weiss 1972:4; original emphasis]

[3] In British colonialism, this aspect of indirect rule policy has been described, in a masterful treatise on the social anthropology of politics by F. G. Bailey (1969: 151), as "a moral conviction that people are entitled to their own beliefs and should be allowed, as far as possible to preserve cherished institutions."

[4] Such an idealistic view has been perpetuated in American history by the main proponent of the "frontier hypothesis," Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner's (1906) hypothesis has been highly criticized by a number of critics as an over simplification and overstatement and as being inadequately supported by fact (cf., Billington 1967).

[5] Using metaphors such as the intangible "forces" which control destiny is a convention I hesitate to encourage or perpetuate. It is not "forces," per se, but individual people who run big business and government, who interpret situations as dilemmas, who make critical decisions, who create (and respond to) crises. Hence, the quotation marks.

CHAPTER EIGHT

[1] A slightly different version of this methodological postscript appears as a chapter in the volume of readings I have edited entitled Anthropologists at Home: Research in One's Own Society (Messerschmidt forthcoming). Parts of this chapter were also presented earlier at American Anthropological Association annual meetings, in 1975 at San Francisco in an unpublished paper entitled "Problems of Role and Method On Site: A Case Study" in the symposium "The Translation of Anthropological Skills to Substantive Research in Experimental Schools," and in 1978, at Los Angeles in an unpublished paper entitled "Anthropologists at Home: Styles and Strategies for Studying One's Own Society" in the symposium "Bringing It Home: Anthropologists Studying Up."

[2] Compare Cumming and Cumming (1957) for a description of a research team being closed out of a similar project in community mental health education.

[3] Both Hodgson and Radcliffe-Brown are reported to have conducted much of their research through native assistants, with little consequent impact on the local people being studied.

[4] Britan (1978c) doubts if anthropological theory and training has any relevance at all for doing summative evaluation of programs such as Experimental Schools. He feels that the anthropologist is best fitted to do contextual evaluation where "an understanding of program context becomes more important" than a summary assessment of actions ascribed to it. For related sentiments about the anthropologist's role in applied research see Barnett (1956) and Wolcott (1975).

[5] "Lurking" as a research method has been described by Stickland and Schlesinger (1969) as a subtle form of information gathering which implies being in the right place or in the right company or conversation at the right time to hear conversation and at times participate in conversation about topics of interest. The data gathered in such a setting may or may not be jotted down, but is usually held in abeyance until a convenient time when it can be recorded privately, so as not to alert informants or interrupt their conversation.

[6] The demise of the Indians at the hand of the White settlers in this region of the American West is a prominent local historical theme, and some oldtimers still believe that "a dead Indian is the best Indian"--sentiments that anthropologists, among others, have difficulty coping with. Today, disdain for the Indian has been passed on to other minorities of color, such as the Cicanos who are found in the region working as laborers and shepherds. Racial biases were only infrequently encountered in the course of this research.

[7] I consciously avoided the term "informant" in conversations on site because of its spy-like connotations as someone who "informs" to the authorities. Such neutral terms as "interviewees," or in this particular instance "living peoples," worked much better. The term "informant" is quite common, however, in the literature on anthropological research, and is used frequently throughout this written case study.

[8] Much of the data one acquires from bureaucrats, especially in the form of plans and progress reports, is what is supposed to be happening, what should happen, and what is expected to happen. Often data on what really happens can be found only in the candid and somewhat offhand or private remarks of the system managers and the bystanders (cf. MacLennan n.d., Serber n.d.). (Some indications of the reality of a situation may come from disgruntled or marginal members of a group under study, but great caution is warranted in using this information, for it is often distorted.) The distinction here is between the ideal, which is most often expressed verbally and on paper for outside observers, and the real which is often expressed privately, if at all. Gerald Britan has noted the same tendency in his similar research within a federal agency (Britan 1978c). The ideal/real distinction is one which anthropologists have long noted in their research.

[9] I avoided eavesdropping which Strickland and Schlesinger (1969) rightly warn is not condoned as a method of inquiry. It implies a form of "spying" or "listening" to conversations totally unbeknownst to the informants and perhaps conversations which, were he obvious, would not be held at all. (See also Footnote 4, above.) Eavesdropping, spying, wire tapping, listening in secretly on extension phones, and planting "bugs" in conference rooms, for example, are blatant violations of informants' rights to privacy and of research ethics. But to informants who tend to forget how accessible and ever-present the anthropologist is during key conversations and discussions, the thin line between lurking and eavesdropping is not always perceived.

[10] NIE and Abt Associates officials spoke in terms of three levels of ES evaluation--Level One, the local effort in each independent project which has been described in Chapter Six; Level Two, the outside evaluation of all the rural projects by Abt Associates researchers, of which this entire case study is one product; and Level Three, which was ostensibly to be an evaluation of the ES program and operations within NIE at the top. Interest in Level Three came about early on, when an "unusually active posture" on the part of ES program officers was observed "in their relations with the ten rural school districts." Researchers at Abt Associates then proposed a plan which defined the ES offices in Washington, D.C., as an "eleventh site," to which a professional on-site observer would also be assigned for study. "Although

we persisted in making this recommendation," Abt's director of Project Rural later wrote, "we were unsuccessful in gaining its authorization" from NIE (Herriott, in the Foreword to Corwin 1977: ii). Later, however, a limited Level Three study was commissioned and a prominent sociologist of education was contracted to prepare a retrospective study of ES program officers and local project officials (Corwin 1977). And, independent of these efforts, an unrelated evaluation of the first difficult years of the NIE bureaucracy was also conducted (Sproull, Weiner and Wolf, 1978).

[11]For a similar account, see Elliott Liebow's reflections (1967:232-56).

[12]A subsequent amendment provided the much needed grandfather clause by setting limitations on access to confidential materials filed prior to January 1, 1975 (Part 99, Title 45), but at first, the lack of a protective clause encouraged plans, like the one described, for culling and purging questionable materials from the files. At the root of the issue was the desire by educators to avoid litigation over the contents of pupil's school files.

[13]Had I not been authorized and had I still insisted on seeing student records, the parents of every one of the nearly 1,500 students in River District would have had to be contacted for permission--an overwhelming task.

[14]For a summary of these and a number of other general and educational press articles, and for an excellent critique and evaluation of the problems at NIE at the time, see Sproull, Weiner and Wolf (1978: 202-216).

[15]This compromise system of indirect reporting through Abt's Cambridge staff to a neutral ethnographer in another program area within NIE worked without internal incident. But, as we shall see, it was not entirely a satisfactory solution from the point of view of the locals in River District. There was also provision for other social science professionals to read and consult with the on-site researchers, Abt, and NIE about the nature and quality of the local research effort. The history of the development of a panel of consultants is partly described by Fitzsimmons (1975); see also Herriott (1977).

[16]Wolcott's study (1978) is only one of several successful adaptations of traditional anthropology to studies of modern American society. See, for other examples, the works of Hsu (1963), Henry (1965), Powdermaker (1939, 1966), and Goldschmidt (1978); see also the essays in Jorgensen and Truzzi (1974) and in Hymes 1974 (and especially Nader 1974). It should be noted that this list is not exhaustive and that only some of these works deal in any specific way with the culture of power and bureaucracy. All, however, exemplify the anthropological study of American society.

[17] In the early days of Project Rural there were concerns that the field researchers were spending too much time discussing their methodological problems while ignoring the substantive issues and research results. That so much effort was at that time going into problems and so little into results is indicative of the seriousness of issues confronted in doing contractual research. See Colfer (1976), Clinton (1975, 1976), Firestone (1975), Wacaster and Firestone (1978), Hennigh (n.d.), and Burns (1976) for various perspectives on applied contract research, ethics, rapport building, informant confidentiality, and similar issues in Project Rural. See also Chambers (1977a, 1977b), Fitzsimmons (1975), Herriott (1977), Trend (1978), and Wolcott (1975) for related comments and perspectives.

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